Learner-centredness in Teachers' Beliefs and Practices: A Study of Secondary Teachers of English as a Foreign Language in China

By

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A thesis submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

School of Education

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University of South Australia

October, 2017

Abstract

China's 2001 curriculum reform policy for basic education was grounded in a 'learner-centred' philosophy, and both the 2001 and 2011 National English Curriculum Standards clearly reflect characteristics of learner-centredness. The implementation of the curriculum, however, has been challenging for secondary school teachers. Quality-oriented learner-centred teaching is difficult for teachers who have experienced traditional exam-oriented and teacher-dominated teaching styles and who have large classes with students of varying English learning backgrounds and many other constraints. As it is more than 15 years since the reform was launched, it is timely to investigate the extent to which learner-centredness is evident in selected secondary English classrooms.

Limited research has been conducted regarding teachers' overall educational beliefs in relation to their actual practices, which give voice to teachers theorizing their practices. Therefore, this study addresses this gap and provides an in-depth understanding of seven Chinese secondary English teachers' overall educational beliefs and practices in relation to learner-centredness in a low socio-economic region in China, exploring factors that influence teacher beliefs and practices.

This qualitative interpretive study adopts a multiple-case study design to investigate seven teachers in two secondary schools. Primary data collection methods include: 1) a semi-structured pre-observation interview (1.5 hours) with each teacher to explore their overall educational beliefs and factors influencing their beliefs; 2) five lesson observations (40/45 minutes) of each teacher's classroom teaching practices; 3) a conversation after each observation when practical and a final individual stimulated-recall interview (1.5 hours) to explore how teachers theorize their practices. Other data collected were school documents, field notes and research diaries. Based on the literature and the emerging themes from the data, a learner-centred analytic framework was then developed to analyze the data in depth and determine the extent to which teachers' beliefs and practices were learner-centred.

Teachers' beliefs varied across the sample. For instance, some teachers embraced exams as the only aim of teaching while some took a more critical stance, embracing both the short-term goal of 'exams' and the long-term goal of developing learners' overall ability. Teachers' practices also varied greatly. Some teachers used diverse classroom activities and tasks to facilitate active learning, making learning relevant and interesting, while others mainly used grammar-translation activities focusing on covering the required content. Some effectively varied interaction and discourse patterns and features to facilitate interaction, language use and practice, as well as learner thinking and reflection, while others used monotonous and ineffective interaction discourse patterns and features. Some used assessment to facilitate active learning and reflection, while others did not. Some used the textbooks and resources flexibly and adaptively, teaching for students' real understanding and skill development, while some mainly used them as they stood, focusing on covering the content. Learning strategies and learners' higher-order thinking were facilitated to varying degrees in different classes. Overall, some teachers created a classroom learning environment and climate more conducive to learning than others.

Teachers' beliefs and practices thus aligned to varying degrees with learner-centredness. Factors influencing teachers' beliefs ranged from their schooling and professional learning to in-service professional development. Teachers' beliefs were not always reflected in their practices, as the application of their beliefs was mediated by a complex process comprising the interaction of three sets of factors: 1) external factors such as the curriculum policy and professional development; 2) teachers' internal factors such as their reflectiveness, openness and motivation for change; and 3) teachers' perception of contextual features. This mediation process led to each teacher's theory of practice, which itself could be changed through reflection on practice and in turn lead to change in underlying beliefs. This process needs to be understood with reference to the particular context and each teacher's socio-cultural and personal background. It is then

possible to explain the variations of alignment with learner-centredness in terms of beliefs and practices, and the discrepancies between beliefs and practices.

This study sheds light on the current status of the implementation of China's learner-centred curriculum reform through clarification of the alignment of teacher beliefs and practices. It also discusses implications for policy makers, school leaders, teacher educators, and teachers.

Table of Contents

Abstract ii

Table of Contents v

List of Figures xii

List of Tables xiii

Acronyms xv

Abbreviations and symbols used in the transcripts xv

Declaration xvi

Acknowledgements xvii

Dedication xix

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION - 1 -

1.1 Context of the study - 4 -

1.2 Research problem - 5 -

1.3 Research gaps - 7 -

1.4 Aim of the study and research questions - 9 -

1.5 Design of the study - 10 -

1.6 Structure of the thesis - 11 -

CHAPTER 2 LEARNER-CENTRED LANGUAGE EDUCATION AND TEACHER BELIEFS - 15 -

2.1 Learner-centredness (LC) - 16 -

2.1.1 Child-centred education - 17 -

2.1.2 Contemporary meanings of learner-centredness (LC) - 20 -

2.1.3 Humanistic view of education - 22 -

2.1.4 Practices for learner-centredness - 24 -

2.1.5 Brain-compatible teaching - 25 -

2.1.6 Summary - 26 -

2.2 Learner-centredness (LC) in second or foreign language (L2) education - 27 -
2.2.1 Origin, development and interpretations of LC in L2 teaching - 27 -
2.2.2 Learner-centred conceptualization of the L2 classroom - 30 -
2.2.3 Summary - 42 -

2.3 Teacher beliefs - 44 -
2.3.1 Origin and development of teacher thinking research - 44 -
2.3.2 L2 teacher thinking - 45 -
2.3.3 L2 teacher beliefs - 45 -
2.3.4 Summary - 50 -

2.4 Chapter summary - 51 -

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY - 52 -

3.1 Research orientation - 52 -

3.2 Research design - 55 -

3.3 Selection of participants - 56 -

3.4 Data collection methods and process - 58 -
3.4.1 Pre-observation interview - 59 -
3.4.2 Observations - 61 -
3.4.3 Post-observation conversational interviews - 62 -
3.4.4 Stimulated recall interview - 62 -
3.4.5 Documents - 63 -
3.4.6 Reflection on the data collection process - 64 -

3.5 Data management and initial analysis - 65 -
3.5.1 Data organization and storage - 65 -
3.5.2 Data transcription and translation - 65 -
3.5.3 Initial data analysis - 66 -

3.6 Development of a framework of learner-centredness - 67 -

3.7 Data analysis - 74 -
3.7.1 Pre-lesson interview data - 74 -
3.7.2 Class observation and post-lesson interview data - 74 -

3.8 Ethical considerations - 76 -

3.9 Trustworthiness of the study - 76 -

3.10 Chapter summary **- 77 -**

CHAPTER 4 TEACHERS' EDUCATIONAL BELIEFS AND FACTORS INFLUENCING THEIR BELIEFS - 79 -

4.1 Participant profiles **- 79 -**
4.1.1 Anli Zhen - 80 -
4.1.2 Bailin Huang - 80 -
4.1.3 Chen Shi - 81 -
4.1.4 Dongmei Zhang - 81 -
4.1.5 Enya Han - 82 -
4.1.6 Fang Yang - 82 -
4.1.7 Guiyun Zhang - 83 -

4.2 Beliefs about aims of L2 teaching **- 83 -**
4.2.1 Preparing students for exams - 84 -
4.2.2 Developing students' ability to speak and use English - 86 -
4.2.3 Facilitating student's learning, thinking ability and overall development - 88 -
4.2.4 Summary and discussion - 90 -

4.3 Beliefs about learners, the teacher and learner–teacher (L–T) relationships **- 92 -**
4.3.1 Learners - 93 -
4.3.2 The teacher - 96 -
4.3.3 Learner–Teacher (L–T) relationships - 101 -
4.3.4 Summary and discussion - 103 -

4.4 Beliefs about learning and teaching **- 106 -**
4.4.1 Learning environment and classroom climate - 108 -
4.4.2 Individual differences - 109 -
4.4.3 Relevance, interest and accessibility of learning - 111 -
4.4.4 Learners be more active and do more telling - 112 -
4.4.5 Learning responsibility and freedom of choices - 114 -
4.4.6 Group/pair work and peer teaching - 116 -
4.4.7 Summary and discussion - 117 -

4.5 Beliefs about content and resources **- 120 -**
4.5.1 Flexibility and adaptability in using textbooks and resources - 121 -
4.5.2 Covering the content versus real understanding, interest and ability development - 122 -
4.5.3 Summary and discussion - 124 -

4.6 Beliefs about assessment **- 127 -**
4.6.1 Assessment for learning - 128 -
4.6.2 Constant monitoring of students' progress - 129 -

4.6.3 Criterion-referenced assessment - 130 -
4.6.4 Learner control regarding assessment - 131 -
4.6.5 Summary and discussion - 132 -

4.7 Findings and discussion - 135 -

4.8 Chapter summary - 138 -

CHAPTER 5 CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND TASKS - 140 -

5.1 Classroom settings and lesson outlines - 140 -

5.2 Revision and conclusion activities - 142 -
5.2.1 Reading aloud in chorus - 143 -
5.2.2 Grammar-translation activities - 144 -
5.2.3 Reflection, recalling and reporting activities - 145 -
5.2.4 Activities for meaningful communication and practice - 146 -
5.2.5 Summary - 148 -

5.3 New words teaching - 149 -
5.3.1 Teacher telling and explaining the words - 150 -
5.3.2 The little teacher activity - 151 -
5.3.3 Translation activity and authentic use of the words - 152 -
5.3.4 Summary - 153 -

5.4 Grammar teaching - 154 -
5.4.1 Foregrounding grammar concepts - 155 -
5.4.2 Facilitating noticing - 156 -
5.4.3 Directly introducing the rules - 157 -
5.4.4 Grammar-translation activities - 158 -
5.4.5 Practice and application in authentic ways - 158 -
5.4.6 Summary - 161 -

5.5 Teaching of reading comprehension - 162 -
5.5.1 Pre-reading activities - 163 -
5.5.2 While-reading activities - 165 -
5.5.3 Post-reading activities - 166 -
5.5.4 Summary - 168 -

5.6 Listening comprehension - 170 -
5.6.1 Pre-listening activities - 171 -
5.6.2 Post-listening activities - 172 -
5.6.3 Summary - 173 -

5.7 Speaking and communication **- 174 -**
5.7.1 Authentic questioning - 174 -
5.7.2 Oral presentation - 175 -
5.7.3 Whole class game-like activities - 179 -
5.7.4 Pair/group work activities - 180 -
5.7.5 Summary - 183 -

5.8 Findings and discussion **- 183 -**

5.9 Chapter summary **- 189 -**

CHAPTER 6 CLASSROOM INTERACTION AND DISCOURSE - 191 -

6.1 Interaction patterns **- 191 -**
6.1.1 T-T pattern - 192 -
6.1.2 T-WC pattern - 193 -
6.1.3 T-1ST Pattern - 194 -
6.1.4 Group–Group pattern and Pair/Group work pattern - 194 -
6.1.5 Summary - 195 -

6.2 Questioning **- 197 -**
6.2.1 Higher-order questioning - 198 -
6.2.2 Student-initiated questioning - 199 -
6.2.3 Discourse patterns - 199 -
6.2.4 Summary - 204 -

6.3 Feedback and error correction **- 208 -**
6.3.1 Teacher feedback and/or correction - 209 -
6.3.2 Peer feedback - 211 -
6.3.3 Peer correction - 212 -
6.3.4 Self-correction - 213 -
6.3.5 Summary - 214 -

6.4 Turn allocation **- 216 -**
6.4.1 Equal turn allocation - 216 -
6.4.2 Student nomination - 218 -
6.4.3 Predictability in turn allocation - 219 -
6.4.4 Summary - 221 -

6.5 Findings and discussion **- 223 -**

6.6 Chapter summary **- 227 -**

CHAPTER 7 ASSESSMENT, CONTENT, LEARNER THINKING, STRATEGIES AND CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT - 228 -

7.1 Assessment - 228 -
7.1.1 Use of formative assessment - 229 -
7.1.2 Use of exam results/papers - 230 -
7.1.3 Findings and discussion - 234 -

7.2 Content and resources - 236 -
7.2.1 Richness of resources and input - 237 -
7.2.2 Adaptation of the textbook and resources - 238 -
7.2.3 Function of content - 239 -
7.2.4 Findings and discussion - 241 -

7.3 Learner thinking and learning strategies - 243 -
7.3.1 Learner thinking - 244 -
7.3.2 Learning strategies - 247 -
7.3.3 Findings and discussion - 250 -

7.4 Classroom learning environment and climate - 253 -
7.4.1 Classroom organization and routines - 254 -
7.4.2 Using inclusive language - 257 -
7.4.3 Demonstrating positive, respectful and trusting attitudes - 258 -
7.4.4 Minimal criticism and threat, with constant encouragement - 260 -
7.4.5 Sharing decision making with learners - 263 -
7.4.6 Findings and discussion - 264 -

7.5 Chapter summary - 268 -

CHAPTER 8 ALIGNMENT OF PRACTICES WITH BELIEFS: INFLUENTIAL FACTORS - 269 -

8.1 Alignment of teachers' practices with beliefs - 269 -
8.1.1 Anli and Bailin - 270 -
8.1.2 Chen, Dongmei and Guiyun - 273 -
8.1.3 Enya and Fang - 277 -
8.1.4 Discussion - 280 -

8.2 Factors that influence teachers' practices and change - 281 -
8.2.1 Teachers' perception of contextual factors - 281 -
8.2.2 Conditioned to a certain way of practice - 288 -
8.2.3 Factors that influence teacher change and curriculum take-up - 291 -
8.2.4 Discussion - 297 -

8.3 Chapter summary **- 300 -**

CHAPTER 9 CONCLUSION **- 301 -**

9.1 Conclusion of this study **- 301 -**

9.2 Conceptualization of the relationship between teacher beliefs and practices **- 303 -**

9.3 Contributions **- 305 -**

9.4 Implications **- 307 -**

9.4.1 Implications for L2 teachers - 307 -

9.4.2 Implications for teacher educators and teacher education - 308 -

9.4.3 Implications for school leaders and policy makers - 309 -

9.4.4 Methodological implications - 311 -

9.5 Limitations of the study **- 312 -**

9.6 Future research **- 312 -**

9.7 Final words **- 313 -**

References **- 315 -**

Appendix 1 Learner-centered psychological principles **- 330 -**

Appendix 2 Information letter to the principal **- 332 -**

Appendix 3 Letter of invitation to teachers **- 334 -**

Appendix 4 Principal's letter of permission **- 336 -**

Appendix 5 Teachers' consent form to participate **- 338 -**

Appendix 6 Interview Protocol 1 **- 340 -**

Appendix 7 Observation protocol **- 344 -**

Appendix 8 Interview protocol 2 **- 345 -**

List of Figures

Figure 2.1	Overview of the literature review chapter	16
Figure 2.2	Model of Learner-centred Teaching	20
Figure 2.3	Learner-centred conceptualization of L2 classroom teaching	42
Figure 4.1	Teacher beliefs and related factors	137
Figure 8.1	Alignment of beliefs and practices with learner-centredness – Anli & Bailin	271
Figure 8.2	Alignment of beliefs and practices with learner-centredness – Chen, Dongmei & Guiyun	273
Figure 8.3	Alignment of beliefs and practices with learner-centredness – Enya & Fang	277
Figure 9.1	Conceptualization of the dynamic relationship between teacher beliefs and practices	303

List of Tables

Table 3.1	Basic information about the participants	58
Table 3.2	Outline of research instruments in relation to research questions	59
Table 3.3	Categories of teacher beliefs and practices	67
Table 3.4a	Categories and indicators of learner-centred teacher beliefs	68
Table 3.4b	Categories and indicators of learner-centred teacher practices	70
Table 3.5a	Mapping alignment of teacher beliefs with learner-centredness	73
Table 3.5b	Mapping alignment of teacher practices with learner-centredness	73
Table 4.1	Teacher beliefs about aims of teaching English	84
Table 4.2	Alignment of beliefs with learner-centredness – Aims of L2 teaching	90
Table 4.3	Beliefs about learners, the teacher and the L–T relationship	93
Table 4.4	Alignment of beliefs with learner-centredness – Learners, the teacher and the L–T relationship	103
Table 4.5	Teacher beliefs about learning and teaching	107
Table 4.6	Alignment of beliefs with learner-centredness – Learning and teaching	118
Table 4.7	Teacher beliefs about content and resources	121
Table 4.8	Alignment of beliefs with learner-centredness – Content and resources	124
Table 4.9	Beliefs about assessment	127
Table 4.10	Alignment of beliefs with learner-centredness – Assessment	132
Table 4.11	Alignment of beliefs with learner-centredness – Overview	135
Table 5.1	Overview of the classroom settings	141
Table 5.2	Abbreviations and symbols used in the transcripts	142
Table 5.3	Activities for revision and lesson conclusion	143
Table 5.4	Alignment of teachers' practices with learner-centredness – Revision and lesson conclusion	149
Table 5.5	Activities for new words teaching	150
Table 5.6	Alignment of teachers' practices with learner-centredness – New words teaching	153
Table 5.7	Activities for grammar teaching	155
Table 5.8	Alignment of teachers' practice with learner-centredness – Grammar teaching	161
Table 5.9	Activities for teaching reading	163
Table 5.10	Alignment of teachers' practices with learner-centredness – Teaching of reading	169

Table 5.11	Activities for teaching listening	170
Table 5.12	Alignment of teachers' practices with learner-centredness – Teaching of listening	173
Table 5.13	Speaking and communication activities	175
Table 5.14	Alignment of teachers' practices with learner-centredness – Speaking and communication activities	183
Table 5.15	Alignment of teachers' practices with learner-centredness – Overview of activities and tasks	185
Table 6.1	Interaction patterns	192
Table 6.2	Alignment of teachers' practices with learner-centredness – Interaction patterns	196
Table 6.3	Overview of teachers' questioning features	197
Table 6.4	Alignment of teachers' practices with learner-centredness – Questioning	206
Table 6.5	Feedback and error correction	209
Table 6.6	Alignment of teachers' practices with learner-centredness – Feedback and error correction	215
Table 6.7	Turn allocation features	216
Table 6.8	Alignment of teachers' practices with learner-centredness – Turn allocation	222
Table 6.9	Alignment of teachers' practices with learner-centredness – Overview of interaction and discourse	223
Table 7.1	Features of assessment	229
Table 7.2	Alignment of teachers' practices with learner-centredness – Assessment	235
Table 7.3	Content and resources	237
Table 7.4	Alignment of teachers' practices with learner-centredness – Content and resources	241
Table 7.5	Learner thinking and learning strategies	244
Table 7.6	Alignment of teachers' practices with learner-centredness – Learner thinking and learning strategies	250
Table 7.7	Learning environment and classroom climate	254
Table 7.8	Alignment of teachers' practices with learner-centredness – Overview	265
Table 8.1	Alignment of teacher beliefs/practices with learner-centredness – Overview	270

Acronyms

APA	America Psychological Association
EFL	English as a foreign language
IATEFL	International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language
ICT	Information and Computer Technology
L2	Second or foreign language
LC	Learner-centeredness
LCI	Learner-centred instruction
LCT	Learner-centred teaching
McREL	Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory
PCM	Personal-centred Model
PD	Professional development
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
WTO	World Trade Organization
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

Abbreviations and symbols used in the transcripts

T	the teacher
STs	the whole class or many students
1ST:	a random student
ST1, ST2 …	the individual students called upon to answer questions
Bb	the blackboard/whiteboard
PPT	projected PowerPoint slide
[]	[Chinese version, translated into English]
( )	(explanation)

Declaration

This thesis presents work carried out by myself and does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; to the best of my knowledge it does not contain any materials previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; and all substantive contributions by others to the work presented, including jointly authored publications, are clearly acknowledged.

Mingkun Lou (娄明坤)



October 10th, 2017

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge my gratitude towards those who have inspired, supported, accompanied, and encouraged me, who have made this challenging PhD journey possible, memorable and enjoyable.

I am greatly indebted to my supervisors. My special thanks to my principal supervisor Emeritus Prof. Bruce Johnson, for his admirable wisdom and invaluable feedback, and for guiding me in the right direction; to my co-supervisor Dr. Greg Restall, for always being there for me and for his great patience, encouragement and feedback; and my co-supervisor Dr. Monica Behrend for scaffolding me to become a better writer with her superb expertise in academic writing, and for her empathy, understanding, feedback and questioning.

I am also indebted to Ms Jena Twiname, who inspired and encouraged me to pursue this PhD study and supported me throughout the difficult journey; to Dr. Ruth Geer and Dr. Lin Zheng for their support at the PhD application stage; to Prof. Barbara Comber for her generosity in sparing time for me and giving me invaluable feedback.

I would like to express my gratitude to the members of the TESOL Researchers Group at the University of South Australia and my PhD colleagues, whose companionship, encouragement and feedback made this journey less lonely and less challenging. My special thanks to Dr. Jenny Barnett for her dedication to the TESOL Researchers Group, for her admirable ways of being, her guidance, feedback and encouragement, and for copy editing my thesis. My thanks also go to Ms Amy Farndale for her companionship and support in the early stage of my PhD journey; to Dr. Hilda Cahyani for her caring and timely advice; to Dr. Oleksandra Poquet for her generosity in sparing time for me and for her critical and invaluable feedback; to Ms Megan Curry for the insightful discussions and generous sharing of her writing; to Ms. Lisa Lim and Mr. Jamie Manolev for always being willing to listen to me and share my emotions; to Dr. Omid Mehrabiyazdi for his caring and support.

I would like to acknowledge the Commonwealth Government funding I received under the Research Training Program (RTP), without which this research would not have been possible. I would also like to thank the leaders and the teacher participants of the two research sites, without their commitment and support, this project could not have been completed.

I would like to thank my parents for their wisdom, ways of being, and great love, who taught me to be a righteous and persevering person with a thankful heart and great aspiration.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my husband Gang Xiao for his unconditional support and love, to my loving daughter Linli Xiao and my loving son Chengxiang Xiao, for showing great understanding at a young age and for bearing the loneliness and separation from me over my PhD journey.

Chapter 1 Introduction

What is taught is not what is learnt;
What is learnt matters more than what is taught.
That's why teaching has to be learner-centred;
But how can I know whether or not I am learner-centred,
If I do not really know what is meant by 'learner-centred'.

Mingkun Lou (2016)

A common concern that English teachers in China have is: *Why am I doing all the hard work but the students are not learning?* One response to this question is that teachers need more insight into the ways that can create and facilitate more effective learning. This response is captured in the above poem, which was composed by me for the *2016 International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language Conference* (IATEFL) where participants were instructed to write a poem which captured the essence of their research study.

This qualitative multiple-case study focuses on learner-centredness in teacher beliefs and practices in the Chinese context of teaching English as a Foreign Language. In 2001, China launched a major curriculum reform with learner-centredness as the guiding pedagogical philosophy. Since then, while some researchers have investigated various aspects of the reform (e.g. Fang & Warschauer, 2004; Hu, 2008; Li & Baldauf, 2011; Wang, 2011; Yan & He, 2012; Li, 2013), apart from Wang (2007), few studies have examined how the philosophy is evident in teachers' beliefs and practices. This research is driven by my desire to explore, research and learn more about improving the effectiveness of English teaching in China. This enduring desire has been triggered by my reflection on my experience as an English learner, teacher and teacher educator in China.

I was born and brought up in a small city in the Southwest of China, where the education level is lower than most parts of the country. Upon high school graduation, my English was poor and I dared not open my mouth to speak a word in English, nor did I need to use English in my daily life. I always wondered why English was so hard to learn. To most students, English proficiency was a myth and something unattainable, as after six years of learning it we students were still unable to speak it for basic communication. Having majored in English literature at university, I spent more time in the library than in the classroom, learning on my own and searching for effective ways to learn English. Working hard and proactively, and seizing every opportunity to practice and use English, I became proficient. My success in learning English further confirmed my belief that English should be taught in different ways. I had realized that English is simply a language, a language that native speakers, young or old, educated or not could speak. English proficiency is not a myth.

My beliefs about English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching and my teaching practices have also been influenced by various teachers, friends and books from western countries, as well as two years' post-graduate study at the University of South Australia. I believe that, on the whole, when students did not learn English well, it was not their fault. Of course, I do not imply it was their teachers' fault, as whatever teachers were doing and could do was constrained by contextual factors and the social reality. For example, the large class size, the nature of the high stakes exams, the traditional teaching norms and practices.

I constantly reflected on my own teaching experience, on other teachers' practices and on conversations with other teachers as a teacher educator. Such questions as *Why am I doing all the hard work but the students are not learning?* (mentioned at the beginning of this chapter) triggered my desire to understand better. Gradually, I realized and now deeply believe that it is a matter of 'knowing about', 'knowing why' and 'knowing how' regarding effective ways of teaching and learning. While the Chinese curriculum reform advocates for learner-centred teaching, little is known among teachers about what is

meant by learner-centredness, why teaching should be learner-centred and how learner-centredness can be realized in everyday step-by-step teaching practices. Therefore, I was eager to expand my understanding and build this connection between theory and practice, to advance English teaching and learning in China. The assertion that 'change is inevitable and only growth is optional' (Urbanski, 1995, p. 282) also made me reflect deeply. I was eager to explore what influences teachers' change and growth, and believed that this needed to be done taking an emic approach, letting teachers' voice be heard, gauging their beliefs, observing their practices, hearing their rationales for their practices, and then interpreting these within the context of the curriculum reform and the larger socio-cultural context. This desire has driven me to the pursuit of this Ph. D. study to address my query in a systematic manner.

This chapter provides an overview and rationale for this study into Chinese secondary English teachers' beliefs and practices, with learner-centredness as a frame of reference. To begin with, it provides the context of the study: namely, China's social, economic and educational context in relation to English teaching and learning and the importance attached to English from the national to the individual level (Section 1.1). This is followed by a formulation of the problems related to the curriculum reform for learner-centred education, which details the challenges facing junior secondary teachers in implementing the Curriculum Standards (Section 1.2). Next come identification of research gaps and justification for the need to investigate integrally teachers' overall beliefs and practices, and the need for more research on under-represented areas and population, such as socially and economically less advanced areas and secondary schools (Section 1.3). The next section states the aims of the study, followed by three sets of research questions about teachers' espoused educational beliefs, their actual practices, the alignment of beliefs and practices with each other and with learner-centredness, as well as factors influencing their beliefs and practices (Section 1.4). Section 1.5 provides an overview of the research design of this qualitative multiple case study which involves seven teachers in two secondary schools. It also outlines the

data collection methods, process and analysis. The chapter concludes with an outline of the thesis structure (Section 1.6).

1.1 Context of the study

Since China's economic reforms and opening up to the world in the 1970s, the Chinese government attaches great importance to English education, considering it an indispensable tool for accessing international advanced science and technology, promoting China's modernization and economic prosperity, as well as enhancing mutual international communication, understanding, and exchange between China and the rest of the world (Hu, 2007; Li & Moreira, 2009; Zhang, 2012). Therefore, English has been regarded as a crucial element in the revitalisation, modernisation, advancement, prosperity, and internationalisation of the nation (Bolton & Graddol, 2012; Gao, 2012a; 2012b; Li & Moreira, 2009). Influenced by the process of globalization and the drive for internationalization, the last two decades have witnessed remarkable expansion and development of English education in China. The national enthusiasm for English learning has noticeably intensified and peaked as a result of China joining the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001 and hosting world events such as the 2008 Olympic and Paralympic Games, and the 2010 World Expo (Li & Moreira, 2009). At the national level, this enthusiasm is driven by the socio-economic climate (ibid.). At the individual level, Chinese learners and teachers regard English as a 'global language', 'a capital', 'a window', and 'a link to get connected with the world' (Pan & Block, 2011, p. 396). English is, therefore, an essential tool for 'acquiring social prestige', gaining 'upward mobility' (Pan & Block, 2011, p. 398) as well as professional promotion and personal success (Gao, 2012a). As Gao (2012a) further explains, English 'functions as a stylistic resource indexing personal social status' and 'modernist aspirations' of individuals (p. 35). The importance attached to English is evident in that it has established its status as a compulsory subject from the third year of primary school onward. It plays an important role throughout and beyond the whole educational system, in gatekeeping for high school, university, and postgraduate study, in contributing to successful university

graduation, as well as in preparing for employment and job promotion (Bolton & Graddol, 2012; Gao, 2012a).

As mentioned, the curriculum reform policy in China's basic education which began in 2001 was grounded in a learner-centred philosophy (Huang, 2004; Wang, 2011; Wang & Ma, 2009). The reform aimed to shift the 'exam-oriented' teacher-dominated instructional model to learner-centred quality education, focusing on 'the needs of "life-long" learners' and 'how learning is best facilitated' (Carney, 2008, p. 39-41; Zhang & Liu 2014). Under the guidance of the curriculum reform policy, China's 2001 National English Curriculum Standards (MOE, 2001) and its revised version (MOE, 2011) reflect the characteristics of learner-centredness. The Curriculum Standards emphasize teaching for the all-round development and laying a good foundation for life-long learning for all students, stressing the importance of the learning process and experience, paying attention to learners' affective aspects such as interest and motivation, as well as respecting and catering for learner differences (MOE, 2001; 2011; Yan & He, 2012). Methodologically, these Standards endorse a task-based and communicative approach to teaching English, promoting participatory, interactive and collaborative learning, aiming at developing both English linguistic and communicative competence in students (MOE, 2001; 2011; Yan & He, 2012; Zhang & Liu, 2014; Zheng & Borg, 2014).

1.2 Research problem

Given this context of English learning in China, this research focuses on one aspect of English teaching, namely the curriculum change to learner-centred pedagogy. Changing the well-entrenched exam-oriented education system is not an easy task. Since ancient China education has been highly valued and regarded as 'the most important and reliable capital for success in life' due to the influence of Confucian heritage beliefs and values (Liu & Wu, 2006, p. 15). Thus, performing well academically has been closely associated with success in family and society (Biggs,

1998). Whether one studies or not, or studies well or not is not purely an individual concern but also a concern of honour or 'face' for the whole family. This tremendous pressure of expectations from teachers, parents, schools and society at large prompts the students to persevere through the 12 years of basic education, aiming at achieving a good result in the College Entrance Exams.

Established in 1952, this gatekeeping exam for higher education has roots dating back to the historical civil service exams system 1,300 years ago (Liu & Wu, 2006). As explained by Liu and Wu (2006), it is most influential and serves as a 'baton' which guides school teaching and learning; it is highly competitive and selective, determining the possibility of upward social mobility for the students (p. 11). Achieving good grades in this examination has been the sole criterion judging teaching and learning (Dello-Iacovo, 2009; Liu & Wu, 2006). Therefore, 'teaching to the test' is a common practice in schools, leading to an exam-centred education system (Liu & Wu, 2006, p. 14), despite the fact that the ancient Chinese teaching philosophy, particularly Confucianism, advocates for experiential learning, emphasizing the importance for reflection, tailoring teaching to learner differences and making learning relevant to the learner (Shim, 2008). For example, a famous and well quoted saying goes:

> Tell me, and I will forget. Show me, and I may remember. Involve me, and I will understand (Xunzi, 325B.C. – 235 B.C.).

Consequently, what is tested and how it is tested have great washback effects on what is taught in schools and how it is taught, resulting in a dominating knowledge transmission approach to teaching.

China's National English Curriculum Standards (MOE, 2001; 2011) stipulate the lowering of the starting age for learning English to the third year in primary school. This policy formulation process is considered by Hu (2007; 2008) to be top-down, lacking sufficient preparation for policy implementation and underestimating the teaching challenges and resources demanded. Given that huge disparities exist between different regions in terms of cultural, economic and educational development, as well as

government support and resources allocation (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Hu, 2005; Wang & Gao, 2008), the Standards permit primary schools in different regions to vary the starting age depending on available teachers and resources. However, whatever variation exists in the primary sector, all the secondary schools will be offering English classes starting from Year 7 with textbooks presuming students have had a three-year English learning background. This assumption challenges secondary teachers, especially junior secondary teachers, as an ordinary junior secondary English class has a large number of students (50–70) of varying backgrounds and competence in English. Some of them may have studied English for three years while others may have never learned any English at all (Hu, 2007). In addition, junior secondary school teachers' English proficiency is generally low, many of them having only a three-year associate degree and some having a degree with a major other than English. As students, they experienced teacher-dominated, grammar-translation and knowledge-transmissive teaching styles, which favoured rote-learning, pattern drilling, and learning about the language (Hu, 2005). Given all these contextual factors, how do these teachers now provide learner-centred quality education?

1.3 Research gaps

Little research has been conducted to find out the state of English teaching in secondary schools in China, let alone secondary schools in socially and economically less-advanced cities. In a review of research on English language education published from 2001-2006, Wang and Gao (2008) found that most papers on classroom practices and learners have disproportionately focused on economically advanced cities and elite learners in tertiary institutions. Even since Wang and Gao's study, the research outputs remained nearly unchanged (e.g. Gao et al., 2007; Gu, 2008; Hu, 2007; 2008; Tong & Shi, 2011; Woodrow, 2011; Zhang, 2013). While a few research studies have been conducted to find out the state of English teaching in senior secondary schools in China, these have been limited to coastal cities (e.g. Zheng & Borg, 2014) and 'key schools' (e.g. Fang & Garland, 2014).

Such representations of individual learners and classroom practices, as remarked by Wang and Gao (2008), could project stereotypes and 'compromise the development of appropriate pedagogy' and policies, as public primary and secondary schools have the majority of English learners in China (p. 390). Furthermore, clear regional disparities exist in EFL teaching due to economic, social and cultural differences across different regions (Hu, 2005). For example, an investigation into four public primary schools located in one of the most economically developed prefectures in China shows that in the 2004–5 school years, the policy reform was only fully implemented in one school located in an urban district, while being totally not implemented in a village school (Hu, 2008). This study reveals a severe shortage of teachers as well as appropriate and adequate teacher professional preparation and training. If this is the situation in a well-developed prefecture, circumstances in economically less well-off areas could be expected to present greater challenges. Therefore, more research is needed to investigate learners, teachers and classroom practices in some under-represented settings, such as in junior secondary schools and in economically less advanced locations.

Limited research studies on EFL teaching in China probe into teachers' perceptions, listening to teachers' voices or looking at things from teachers' points of view. In the review by Wang and Gao (2008), no studies mentioned teachers' beliefs and theoretic orientations about their classroom practices. Nevertheless, teachers' basic beliefs and assumptions about education, learners, learning and teaching, whether explicit or implicit, will translate into a core philosophy and culture affecting their behaviours and practices at the school and classroom levels (McCombs & Whisler, 1997). Since Wang and Gao's review, only a small cohort of research has tapped into teacher beliefs (e.g. Gao & Ma, 2011; Goh & Chen, 2014; Li & Baldauf, 2011; Zeng & Murphy, 2007), along with some investigating teacher beliefs together with their practices (e.g. Tian, 2013; Yang & Gao, 2013; Zeng, 2012; Zheng, 2013). Given the 'central role' teachers play 'in shaping classroom events', to better understand teachers and teaching, more research should be conducted to understand teachers' beliefs and their practices

integrally (Borg, 2006, p. 1).

In her Ph. D. study, Wang (2007) surveyed 1000 primary EFL teachers from seven different provinces in China about their attitudes towards and beliefs about learner-centred teaching. She also observed 18 classes which were taught by 18 good teachers. These were mainly public demonstration classes observed by many other teachers in a hall rather than a real classroom setting. After the observations, public interviews or group interviews were conducted to discuss and reflect on the class observations. Wang commented that had it not been for time constraints, a more in-depth study could have been conducted to find out how each of the 18 teachers theorized their teaching and what pedagogical principles were behind their practices, so as to gain the insight into the factors that influence teachers' beliefs and behaviours. She also called for more research in schools and classrooms in different parts of the country to see how other teachers have managed to cope with changes stipulated by the Curriculum Standards and policies. In a case study of technology-enhanced tertiary EFL pedagogical innovation in eastern China, Fang and Warschauer (2004) found that student-centred teaching clashed with Chinese traditional pedagogical norms and beliefs.

As it is 16 years since the 2001 Curriculum Standards and policies document was released, to what extent has learner-centredness found its way into secondary EFL classrooms and in what ways have teachers addressed all of the constraints on them to provide 'quality-oriented teaching' which is learner-centred? This study gives voice to seven EFL teachers in non-elite secondary schools in a city in the Southwest of China, which is socially and economically less developed than regions like Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou.

1.4 Aim of the study and research questions

This study first aims to provide an in-depth understanding of secondary EFL teachers' overall educational beliefs in relation to their practices, focusing on what teachers say

and do, and how they account for what they do. Learner-centredness will serve as the key frame of reference. Second, the study aims to explore factors that influence teachers' beliefs and practices, thereby providing a further understanding of the particularity of specific contexts and current practices of EFL learning and teaching in two selected secondary schools in China. This is done with reference to China's socio-historic and cultural background and current government policies. To achieve the aims, the following three sets of questions were formulated:

1. What are teachers' espoused educational beliefs? How do these beliefs align with learner-centredness? What factors influence teachers' beliefs?
2. What are the features of the EFL teachers' teaching practices? How do their practices align with learner-centredness?
3. How do their practices align with their beliefs? What factors influence the alignment or misalignment?

1.5 Design of the study

Guided by the social constructivist worldview and paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Creswell, 2013), this research is qualitative, interpretive and naturalistic, with the goal being to 'document and interpret as fully as possible the totality of whatever is being studied in a particular context from the people's viewpoint or frame of reference' (Leininger, 1985, p. 5). It adopts a multiple-case study design to study in depth seven individual Chinese secondary EFL teachers in naturally occurring circumstances in two non-elite secondary schools, starting from their expressed practices to their actual teaching practices, and following on to an interpretation of these within the context (Flick, 2009; Simons, 2009). Data collection methods included: an individual pre-observation interview with each teacher; five classroom observations of each teachers' practices; post-observation conversations and an individual stimulated recall interview with each teacher; collection of publicly available school documents and other resources shared by the school during data collection; field notes and research diaries (see Table 3.1). The combination of these methods resulted in a comprehensive collection of data encompassing the teachers' overall educational beliefs, factors

influencing their beliefs, their classroom practices, their explanation for their practices, socio-cultural contexts of the school and insights about the curriculum policy implementation.

Analysis of the data highlighted major themes of teacher beliefs and practices conceptualized in the literature review chapter and/or emergent from the data, focusing on (a) beliefs about: aims of L2 teaching; learners, the teacher and the Learner-Teacher (L–T) relationship; learning and teaching; content and resources; assessment; and (b) practices regarding learning tasks and activities; classroom interaction and discourse; assessment; content and resources; learning strategies and learner thinking; and classroom learning environment and climate. Teachers' beliefs and practices are mapped using a framework of learner-centredness generated from both the literature review and themes which emerged from the data; the alignment with learner-centredness is mapped out in a series of metrics. Factors influencing teachers' beliefs and practices are also identified and analyzed. The analysis contributed to the findings of this study by enabling a conceptualization of the relationship between teacher beliefs and practices. This study is based on the premise that teachers' beliefs and practices should be studied integrally and that teachers' beliefs may not be indicative of their practices as the application of their beliefs is mediated by a range of internal and external factors as well as the particular socio-cultural and historical contexts of each individual.

1.6 Structure of the thesis

Chapter 1 has introduced the topic of the thesis, the background of the study, the research problem, the aim and research questions, the research design and the structure of the thesis. It highlights the challenges associated with the implementation of a learner-centred curriculum in English as a foreign language classroom in non-elite secondary schools in low socio-economic regions. The chapter argues for the importance of teacher voice in understanding curriculum implementation and the

importance of studying teachers' beliefs and their practices integrally to have a comprehensive understanding of teachers, teaching and the subjective contextual reality of teachers.

Chapter 2 first conceptualizes the development of learner-centred education in general education and links learner-centredness with language education. It then provides a holistic conceptualization of L2 classrooms. This is followed by an outline of the development of research on teacher thinking in education in general and research on teacher beliefs in language education. This chapter identifies a gap in the literature, namely, the lack of research studies that investigate L2 teachers' overall beliefs in relation to their practices.

Chapter 3 addresses methodological considerations, highlighting the philosophical considerations that underpin this study. The research design and the data collection methods are also detailed. The two research contexts are described and the profiles of the participants are provided. This chapter also details the development of the learner-centred analytic framework and the associated matrices for the mapping of teachers' beliefs and practices, followed by a description of the data analysis procedures and processes.

Chapter 4 analyzes the pre-observation data, exploring teachers overall educational beliefs and perceptions about the curriculum reform and implementation. Their beliefs are referenced against a framework of learner-centredness, and the alignment of their beliefs with learner-centredness is mapped out in metrics. Factors influencing teachers' beliefs as reported by teachers are also identified. This chapter demonstrates the internal interaction among different beliefs espoused by teachers, and that the application of their beliefs is mediated by their perception of the contextual factors, and thus may not be indicative of their practices.

Chapters 5 to 7 analyze the classroom observation data based on the six dimensions of L2 classroom teaching as conceptualized in Section 2.2 of the literature review. Chapter

5 presents teachers' practices from the perspective of classroom activities and tasks, providing an insight into what the teacher and students did in the classroom learning and teaching process – the nature of the activities and tasks that were used and the effectiveness of these in facilitating meaningful and significant learning.

Chapter 6 explores teachers' practices from the perspective of classroom interaction and discourse. It provides a comprehensive analysis and explanation of the nature of the interaction and discourse that took place in class, adding to the understanding of what opportunity was there for the students to participate and produce the language, what kind of interaction was going on and thus what kinds of discussion, learning and thinking were facilitated.

Chapter 7 analyzes teachers' practices from the other four identified dimensions of L2 classroom teaching: assessment, content and resources, learner thinking and learning strategies, and classroom learning environment and climate. It further adds to the understanding of how the students are assessed and evaluated, how the content and resources are used, how learner thinking and learning strategies are promoted or constrained, and the way the classroom learning environment and climate are created, identifying the effectiveness of teachers' practices in facilitating a learner-centred environment conducive to learning. Teachers' practices are then mapped against the framework of learner-centredness.

Chapter 8 connects teachers' practices with teachers' beliefs to discuss how teachers' practices align with their beliefs and how these two align with learner-centredness. It then explores factors that influenced teachers' practices and change, drawing on the post-observation interview data and the information about the overall contextual factors. The analysis reveals a whole range of factors that mediated teachers' beliefs and the application of those beliefs, leading to teachers' theory of practice underpinning their teaching. The findings explain the discrepancies between teachers' beliefs and practices, uncover factors that influence teacher change, and point to the importance of

understanding the particular contexts within which each teacher carries out their work.

Chapter 9 first provides a conclusion of this study. It then conceptualizes the dynamic relationship between teacher beliefs and practices as derived from the overall findings. Next, it examines the contributions of the study, followed by discussions of its implications for L2 teachers, teacher educators and teacher education, school leaders and policy makers, the curriculum reform and policy process, and research methodology. Finally it discusses the limitations of this study and makes recommendations for future research.

In summary, this doctoral thesis investigates Chinese secondary EFL teachers' beliefs and practices with learner-centredness as a frame of reference. It provides a comprehensive understanding of seven teachers' overall educational beliefs and practices, factors influencing their beliefs and practices and the learner-centredness of their beliefs and practices. The alignment of teachers' practices with their beliefs and factors influencing their practices as reported by teachers and informed by the contextual information are also explored. The findings are then discussed and interpreted with reference to teachers' particular socio-cultural and historical contexts within which they teach. This study adds to the understanding of learner-centredness in relation to L2 classrooms practices and teacher beliefs, the complex relationship between teacher beliefs and practices, the current status of English teaching in these two secondary schools in China, shedding light on the curriculum implementation and reform.

Chapter 2 Learner-centred language education and teacher beliefs

Given that this research focuses on learner-centred language education and teacher beliefs, this literature review chapter has three main aims: 1) conceptualizing the development of learner-centred (LC) education; 2) linking LC with language education and conceptualizing the second or foreign language (L2) classroom from a holistic perspective; 3) outlining the development of research on teacher thinking in education in general and on teacher beliefs in language education specifically. The review will show the relationship between the various constructs in guiding research conceptualization and in theorizing the data chapters 4 to 8.

Section 2.1 focuses on learner-centredness in general education. It first outlines the origin and development of learner-centred education, followed by a review of the contemporary meaning of learner-centredness. It then examines the humanistic view of education, which supports the foundation of learner-centred education. Last, it provides examples of learner-centred practices as discussed in the literature. Section 2.2 focuses on learner-centredness in L2 education. It first outlines the development and interpretation of learner-centredness in the field of L2 education. Then, it puts forward a holistic conceptualization of the language classroom to guide the study of teacher practices. Section 2.3 focuses on L2 teacher beliefs. It first outlines the origin and development of research on teacher thinking in general education and in L2 education specifically. This is followed by a review of literature on L2 teacher beliefs to reveal its current development and research gaps. Figure 2.1 provides an overview of this chapter.

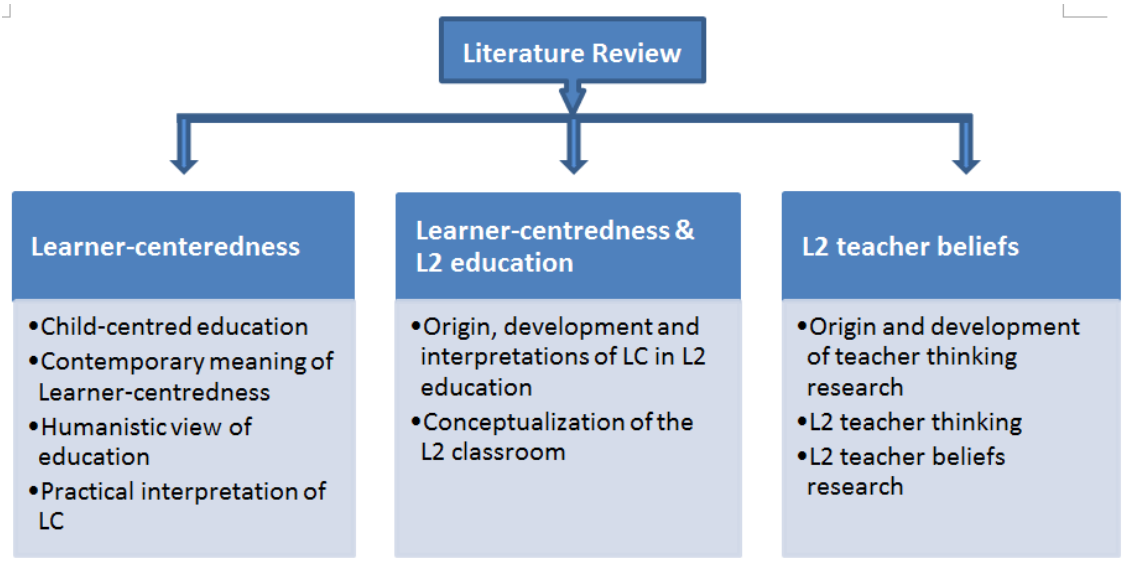


Figure 2.1 Overview of the literature review chapter

2.1 Learner-centredness (LC)

Learner-centred education has become a 'global phenomenon' (Schweisfurth, 2013, p. 1). The learner-centred philosophy has guided educational reform and teaching practices in many countries and regions such as the US, China, Thailand, India, North Cyprus, South Africa and European countries (Aliusta et al., 2015; Altinyelken, 2011; Brinkmann, 2014; Brodie, Lelliott & Davis, 2002; Hoidn, 2016; O'Sullivan, 2004; Treesuwan & Tanitteerapan, 2016; Wang, 2007). However, its meaning has been difficult to conceptualize due to different interpretations and some misunderstandings. Therefore an up-to-date understanding of its meaning is necessary in order to better inform educational practices and research. To this end, it is deemed necessary to trace the origin of learner-centred education and how it has developed.

As learner-centred education dates back to child-centred education more than 250 years ago, this section first provides a brief history and development of child-centred education. Then it presents the contemporary meaning of learner-centredness, with reference to learner-centred psychological principles (APA, 1997). Next, it reviews the humanistic view of education and Roger's person-centred model of teaching and learning (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994), in which learner-centredness is well-grounded. Last,

it provides examples of learner-centred practices with specific reference to *Five Changes for Learner-centred Practices* (Weimer, 2002; 2012) and brain compatible teaching (Kaufeldt, 2010).

2.1.1 Child-centred education

Child-centred education developed from extreme dissatisfaction with the traditional subject-centred, teacher-directed approach to education, which featured imparting skills, emphasizing factual information, 'gritty application and memory work', teachers 'expounding the subject and instructing the whole class at once' (Darling, 1994, p. 2). As a reaction against such traditional practices, progressive educators stressed the importance of appreciating children as individuals with a unique personal history and characteristics such as ability, aptitude, interest, experience and cultural capital (Entwistle, 1970). Child-centred progressive education emphasizes the 'natural development' of the whole child (Moyer, 2009, p. 531) and the need to redesign schools and curriculum to be in better accord with the disposition of the learner (Darling, 1994, p. 17).

Child-centredness was for the first time fully illustrated in Rousseau's *Emile* (Darling, 1994; Entwistle, 1970). This book depicted Rousseau's education plan for an imaginary student Emile, centring on Emile's interests while teaching was projected as facilitating rather than directing Emile's learning (Neumann, 2013). Rousseau (1762) claimed that: 'Nature provides for the child's growth in her own fashion, and this should never be thwarted' (p. 50) and he asserted: 'let the child do nothing on anybody's word. Nothing is good for him unless he feels it to be so' (p. 178). This view of education requires that the teacher not 'impose his own objectives for learning' but facilitate inquiries (Noddings, 2015, p. 39).

Rousseau's theory about child-centred education was carried forward by a succession of thinkers like Pestalozzi, Froebel and Dewey (1990), who contributed to the development of this theory by reworking, scrutinizing and modifying the theory to make

it more ‘soundly based or wisely interpreted’ (Darling, 1994, p. 17). In Europe, Pestalozzi, a Swiss educator, contributed to the theory by emphasizing the importance of ‘contact with realities’ (ibid., p. 19) and the importance of harmony between the teacher’s message and demands upon the child with the powers of the child at the moment (Green, 1912). He believed that all children are active learners, and thus teachers are to stimulate children’s self-activity rather than to instruct them (Doddington & Hilton, 2007). Greatly influenced by the ways Pestalozzi’s schools were set up in Switzerland, one of Pestalozzi’s students, Froebel, a German educator, made a great contribution by emphasizing the importance of guided and purposeful play, experiment, and discovery, restricted direct teaching and instruction, as well as active and creative work for children’s development (Fröbel & Herford, 1916). The term ‘kindergartens’ invented by Froebel is said to be ‘perhaps the most powerful institutional framework ever invented to embody and promote child-centred ideas’ (Doddington & Hilton, 2007, p. 14).

In the US, Dewey’s writing expounded child-centred education so influentially that it made the legitimation of child-centred educational theory possible (Darling, 1994, p. 24-25). Dewey emphasized the importance of social learning and school education, disagreeing with Rousseau’s (1762) perspective that ‘it is up to him to desire it, to seek it, to find it’ (p. 179), which implied leaving the child to develop spontaneously in a rather isolated environment (Darling, 1994; Doddington & Hilton, 2007; Entwistle, 1970). From Dewey’s perspective, learning takes place through group community-based activities, linking up with real life activities, problems and students’ interests, with the purpose being to enable the learner to see the usefulness, the meaning and connection of learning to the real world (Darling, 1994). Dewey’s vision of school is different from the traditional school on which he comments:

> The centre of gravity is outside the child. It is in the teacher, the textbook, anywhere and everywhere … except in the immediate instincts and activities of the child himself (Dewey, 1990, p. 34).

He called for a change in education by the 'shifting of the centre of gravity' so that the child becomes the centre of educational design and practice (Dewey, 1990, p. 34). Dewey emphasized the importance of social interaction in a co-operative, encouraging and mutually helpful environment for human development (Darling, 1994).

Child-centred education began to influence the traditional education system in Europe, became prevalent in the rhetoric of education in America in the 1940s and was publicly endorsed by *The Plowden Report* in the UK in the 1960s (Darling, 1994). In these countries, child-centred education experienced various attacks and criticisms due to misinterpretations and political as well as economic reasons throughout the years (for details, refer to Darling, 1994 and Entwistle, 1970). Since the end of the 1980s, child-centred education started to decline in the industrialized world like the US and the UK (Darling, 1994, Doddington & Hilton, 2007; Entwistle, 1970). With many politicians arguing that 'educational success, measured by tests for different age groups, meant economic success', these countries made efforts to 'formalize' their education systems by promoting testing and exerting highly-controlled measures over curriculum and monitoring of standards (Doddington & Hilton, 2007, p. 48-49). However,

> the narrowing of education to economic ends has not proved effective in raising economic performance while having a detrimental effect on education's potential for liberalizing and humanizing the development of a young child's personality (ibid., p. 49).

In the meantime, however, Asian countries like Japan, China, Singapore and South Korea have realized the importance of liberalizing their education systems to 'allow independence of mind and creativity in the young' for 'future economic success' (ibid., p. 48).

This brief history has shown that as a catchword, 'child-centred education' has 'all the potential for promoting change and creating misunderstanding' (Entwistle, 1970, p. 12). The interpretation of its meaning is subjective to different philosophical and political perspectives and the social and economic contexts within which it is interpreted. Nevertheless, despite all possible misinterpretations or criticisms, the essence of

child-centred philosophy was to be carried forward to guide and inform educational practices. This mission is now carried forward by contemporary 'learner-centred education', which is well-based on research and theories.

2.1.2 Contemporary meanings of learner-centredness (LC)

Although dating back to child-centred education more than 250 years ago, the term 'learner-centredness' (LC) has an expanded meaning to apply to learners of all ages, combining 'learn*er*-centred' and 'learn*ing*-centred' perspectives. The contemporary meaning of LC is defined by McCombs & Whisler (1997, p. 9) as having a combined focus on:

- **Individual learners** – their heredity, experiences, perspectives, backgrounds, talents, interests, capacities and needs
- **Learning** – the best available knowledge about learning and how it occurs
- **Teaching practices** – the most effective practices in promoting the highest levels of motivation, learning, and achievement for all learners.

With its combined focus on learners, learning, and teaching, a holistic perspective of the contemporary model of learner-centred teaching is conceptualized in Figure 2.2, drawing on the work of McCombs & Whisler (1997). Central to this framework is what teachers know about the learners, learning and effective teaching, and how this knowledge interacts with various contextual and learner factors, to finally create positive student experiences and increasing student motivation, learning and achievement.

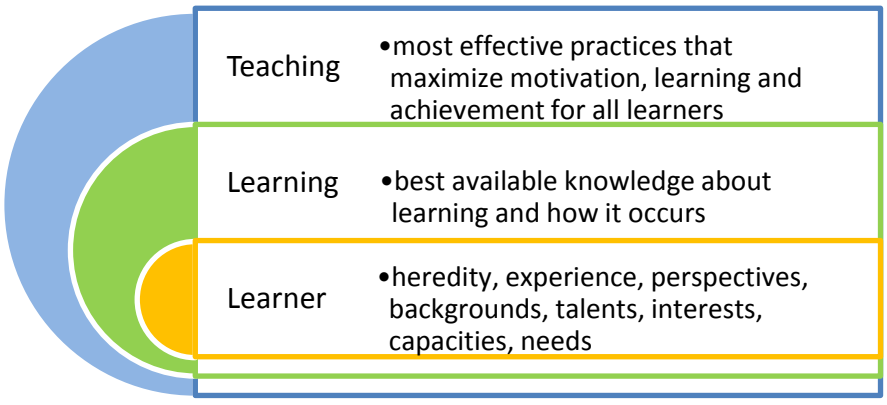


Figure 2.2 Model of Learner-centred Teaching (adapted from McCombs & Whisler (1997)

The contemporary meaning of LC is informed by the 14 learner-centred psychological principles (see Appendix 1) which were designed to guide school redesign and reform in the US. These were developed by a large group of educational researchers belonging to the American Psychological Association Presidential Task Force on Psychology in Education and the Mid-Continent Regional Educational Laboratory (Alexander & Murphy, 1998). These principles were developed based on a review of over a century of research relevant to education, specifically on learning, motivation, development, individual differences, cultural diversity and the assessment of student learning outcomes (Alexander & Murphy, 1998; McCombs, 2013).

These principles comprise four domains or sets of factors concerning:

1. Cognitive and metacognitive factors – effective learning is a goal-oriented active meaning-making process linking new information with prior knowledge and experience using a repertoire of cognitive and metacognitive strategies in a socio-cultural context
2. Motivational and affective factors – learner effort and learning practice is 'influenced by the learner's motivation', especially intrinsic motivation, which, in turn, is 'influenced by a learner's emotional states, beliefs, interests, goals and habits of thinking'
3. Developmental and social factors – learning is influenced by social interaction, interpersonal relations and communication, as well as characteristics of individual learners' physical, intellectual, emotional and social developmental stages
4. Individual difference factors – learners have different ways and capacities of learning due to different prior experiences, heredity, linguistic and socio-cultural backgrounds, and setting standards and integrated assessment of appropriately high and challenging content is an integral part of the learning process (McCombs, 2013, p. 93).

The learner-centred psychological principles are informed and supported by various theories including humanism, constructivism, social constructivism, intrinsic motivation theories, and cognitive theories of learning and instruction (Lambert & McCombs, 1998) as well as cognitive neuroscience research findings (Kaufeldt, 2010). A review of all these theories is beyond the scope of this study; however specific attention is paid to the humanistic view of education, as the principles are consistent with the humanistic view of learner dispositions and personal potential perspectives and the principles advocated by Rogers' person-centred model (McCombs, 2013). This humanistic view of education and the person-centred model (PCM) is elaborated in the next section.

2.1.3 Humanistic view of education

The contemporary meaning of learner-centredness is well-grounded in the person-centred model (PCM) developed by one of the founders of humanistic psychology, Carl Rogers (Rogers, 1969; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994). Humanism emphasizes the development of the whole person and the importance of the inner world of the learner, such as their thoughts, feelings and emotions, rather than focusing solely upon the development and employment of cognitive skills (William & Burden, 1997). To humanists, people are 'free and unique, self-directed, and capable of setting goals, making choices and initiating action'; therefore, parents and teachers should accompany children on the ways to self-discovery, encouraging children's independence, creativity, self-reliance, and self-evaluation, as well as giving them responsibility for their own learning and development (McInerney & McInerney, 2010, p. 446-447).

Rogers (1969) believes that 'human beings have a natural propensity for learning' and 'significant learning' occurs when it is meaning oriented, namely, when the learner perceives what is to be learned as relevant for his or her own purposes, and when external criticism and perceived threat to the learner's self-image is minimal (p. 157-159). Learning is facilitated when the student participates responsibly and it is most lasting and pervasive when it is self-initiated and involves the whole person of the learner, both feelings and intellect (p. 162). Furthermore, the learner's 'independence, creativity, and self-reliance are all facilitated when self-criticism and self-evaluation' are encouraged (p. 163). Rogers sees the goal of education being 'facilitation of change and learning' and 'the facilitation of significant learning rests upon certain attitudinal qualities in the personal relationship between the facilitator and the learner', such as 'realness in the facilitator', 'prizing, acceptance, trust', and 'empathic understanding' (p. 104-111). To elaborate, it means that a facilitator should be a real person having a direct personal encounter with the learner (rather than putting on a mask of being a teacher), prizing the learner's feelings, opinions and as a person, accepting the learner for who he/she is, having worth in his/her own right, and believing that the learner is fundamentally trustworthy. Rogers (1983) also emphasizes the 'crucial importance' of

‘freedom and responsibility’ as one’s ‘personal choice and responsibility account for the shape of his life’ (p. 280).

Rogers’ person centred model (PCM) is primarily an approach or a philosophy to the teaching–learning situation (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994). It focuses on the perceptions and experiences of learning, as well as a well-grounded foundation of whole-person concepts such as actualization, empathy, congruence, and unconditional positive regard (McCombs, 2013). According to Rogers and Freiberg (1994), the person-centred classroom is a human and interactive environment which encourages students to think for themselves, help each other, and actively participate. It emphasizes caring, guidance, cooperation, the building of self-discipline that is developmentally appropriate for the learners, as well as the learner being the important figure who is responsible for the evaluation of his/her own experience. The phenomenological philosophical underpinnings of the PCM theory relates to current theories of constructivism, which acknowledge that personal experiences and the individual’s subjective reality are crucial for how learners orient and relate in the world (McCombs, 2013). The PCM theory identifies the optimal conditions under which the actualizing tendency guides human learners toward a constructive development of their inherent potential (Rogers, 1967; McCombs, 2013). The key features of the facilitative conditions for the PCM, according to Rogers and Freiberg (1994), will foster all kinds of constructive learning, both personal and intellectual. These features include:

The facilitative teachers:

- Create a growth-promoting facilitative learning climate
- Share decision making and allow all those affected to support and be supported
- Share the responsibility for the learning process
- Provide various sources of learning resources, encourage learners’ input, and open the doors to resources outside the experience of the group
- Foster the continuing process of learning rather than the content of learning.

The students:

- Make choices about their learning directions

- Carry the responsibility of the consequences of those choices
- Act as the primary evaluators of the extent and significance of their own learning
- Learn from each other
- Reach personal goals through self-discipline
- Recognize and accept that discipline is their own responsibility.

These features show that the PCM requires a profound change in classroom power relationships, the roles of the teacher and the student, perspectives on the content goals and the process, methods of assessment, responsibility of the students, and the classroom discipline. Similar ideas are proposed in *Five Changes for Learner-centred Practice* by Weimer (2002; 2012), which is presented in the following section.

2.1.4 Practices for learner-centredness

Weimer contends that learner-centred teaching (LCT) focuses attention on what and how the student is learning under what learning conditions, 'whether the student is retaining and applying the learning', as well as 'how current learning positions the student for future learning' (Weimer, 2002, XVI). She proposed the following five areas of change for teachers to make in order to adopt LCT:

1. change in the balance of power – teachers willingly and responsibly begin to give students some control over decision making so as to create motivated, confident and responsible learners;
2. change in the function of content – content should have a dual function as a body of knowledge and as a vehicle to develop learning skills;
3. change in the role of the teacher – teachers create climates for learning, do more design work and modelling, do more to encourage students to learn from and with each other, do more with feedback, but do fewer learning tasks and less telling, so that students can do more discovering;
4. change in the responsibility for learning – get students to accept the responsibility for learning by creating classroom climates conducive to learning and by building students' autonomy and responsibility;

5. change in the purposes and processes of evaluation – use evaluation experiences to promote learning by focusing on learning processes, reducing the stress and anxiety of evaluation experiences, incorporating more formative feedback mechanisms, using various approaches to assessment, and supporting students in the preparation for assessment.

Illustrated with practical examples, Weimer has bridged theory and practice, making learner-centred philosophy more accessible and applicable. Some other examples of learner-centred practices are presented in the next section regarding brain compatible teaching.

2.1.5 Brain-compatible teaching

Learner-centred teaching is supported by cognitive neuroscience research findings (Cornelius-White & Harbaugh, 2010; Doyle, 2012; Kaufeldt, 2010). These findings have been used to develop educational practices and strategies called Brain-Compatible Teaching practices. For example, Kaufeldt (2010) proposed three key elements that constitute brain-compatible education: 1) a safe and secure and enriched environment to enable an optimal state of mind for meaningful learning; 2)'meaningful multisensory experiences'; 3) active 'process of new concepts in a variety of ways to assure long-term retention' (p. 11). Examples of strategies to promote brain compatible education relating to classroom environment and climate are:

- Maintaining an atmosphere of trust and respect, with low threat and high challenge
- Keeping learning joyful and yet rigorous
- Making sure students know the agenda, purpose, and game plan
- Creating a physically healthy and safe environment
- Fostering a sense of inclusion (*ibid.*, p. 11-17)

Examples regarding learning strategies and learner thinking are:

- Demonstrated and applied strategies
- Allowing adequate time for reflection, contemplation, and expansion to process new information

- Teaching coping strategies for dealing with everyday stress and resolving conflict
- Promoting reflection on the product and process of learning (*ibid.*, p. 11-17)

Examples regarding content, resources and learning process are:

- Ensuring content is meaningful, relevant and developmentally appropriate
- Providing a wide variety of input, resources and multiple opportunities for students to discover and process information based on their preferred learning styles
- Providing complex, interactive, first-hand learning experiences
- Providing a variety of collaboration opportunities for students to acquire and practice communication and social skills (*ibid.*, p. 11-17)

These strategies are believed to be examples of learner-centred education (*ibid.*), which promotes the effectiveness of the brain, thus maximizing learning efficiencies.

2.1.6 Summary

So far learner-centred theory and practices have been reviewed and illustrated with reference to learner-centred psychological principles, a humanistic view of education and people with a person-centred model (PCM), and brain-compatible teaching. The concepts and principles of learner-centredness in general education have been made clearer through examples of learner-centred practices.

Based on this review, learner-centredness is defined as the ways in which the teacher tailors all teaching practices to focus on the learning and overall development of the learners, attending to learners' specific affective, cognitive, individual and social needs. These practices include curriculum choices such as sharing power and decision making with learners, being partners with learners in the learning process, engaging learners in active learning and participation, making learning relevant, interesting, challenging and meaningful to learners, maximizing and enabling the dual functions of the resources and materials, and using assessment to facilitate learning.

However, to unlock its full potential to guide practice in subject specific areas, learner-centredness needs to be interpreted with reference to subject specific theories

and research, which, in the case of this study, means English as a foreign language theories and research. This is what the next section will attend to.

2.2 Learner-centredness (LC) in second or foreign language (L2) education

This section aims to link learner-centred philosophy with L2 education, and how L2 practitioners and researchers interpret and integrate this philosophy. It first provides an overview of the development and interpretations of learner-centredness in L2 education, with specific reference to Nunan's (1988; 1999) concept of learner-centred curriculum and Tudor's (1996) perspectives on LC. There follows a comprehensive conceptualization of the L2 classroom, taking into consideration all key elements, and serving as a framework for considering the nature of learner-centredness in the language classroom. In turn, this paves the way for generating a framework of learner-centredness as a tool for data analysis, which will be detailed in Section 3.6.

2.2.1 Origin, development and interpretations of LC in L2 teaching

The interest in LC in the field of L2 teaching started in the 1960s when the L2 teaching community had an increasing desire to make teaching more responsive to learners' needs, allowing learners to 'play a fuller, more active and participatory role' in learning (Tudor, 1996, p. 1). However, it was not until the mid-1970s that L2 teaching came to 'espouse principles of learner-centred teaching' and in the 1980s the term learner-centredness appeared in books or articles on L2 teaching (Hedge, 2002, p. 362; Tudor, 1996). Ever since then, it has had different interpretations associated with a variety of methods or approaches of language teaching, including:

- Communicative language teaching – featuring 'a high degree of peer-to-peer and/or peer-to-teacher interaction', 'authentic, meaningful and purposeful language', involving 'learning how to use' rather than mainly learning about the language, and emphasizing 'meaning over form' (Juan & Flor, 2008, p. 161; Thomson, 1992; Freeman, 2011; Brown, 2014)
- Task-based language teaching – emphasizing 'classroom interaction', 'authenticity', 'viewing the learner's own experiences as important contributors

to learning' (Brown, 2014, p. 237; Skehan, 1998; Willis & Willis, 2001; Ellis, 2003)

- Interest based learning – valuing learner ability to express personal interest and conviction, collaborative syllabus development, diagnostic assessment through spoken and written language output, self-direction and awareness (Wahjuni, 2012)
- Project-based learning – featuring 'extended tasks' similar to real-life tasks, involving 'integrate language skills', goal directed, group collaboration and discussion, problem solving, oral and written reporting (Stoller, 1997; Hedge, 2002, p. 362; Li, 2010).

Learner-centredness is also associated with a range of language learning activities such as group-work activities (Bailey, 2004), information-gap and jig-saw tasks (Shehadeh, 2012). However, these approaches and activities, while purporting to be learner-centred, are only partial representations of the full range of possibilities of learner-centred teaching, making this term hard to conceptualize. Therefore, 'when pressed hard, few practicing teachers and instructors know what LC [LCI] is exactly, why it is more effective for L2 learning and teaching, and how to implement it' in the L2 classroom (Shehadeh, 2012, p. 5). In fact, learner-centredness is a guiding philosophy that goes beyond methods or activities. It is 'a broadly-based endeavour' (Tudor, 1996, p. ix) that tailors all aspects of language teaching according to learner needs and characteristics, including the content and forms of teaching, as well as 'planning and evaluation' (Richards & Schmidt, 2010, p. 326-327).

In terms of curriculum development, Nunan's (1988) concept of learner-centred curriculum is the most influential perspective on learner-centredness. It not only emphasizes the central role of learners as the reference point for teachers' decision-making, but more importantly, it highlights the active role of learners and the importance of consultation and negotiation with the learners throughout the learning and teaching process. Teachers guided by a learner-centred philosophy use information about and /or from learners to inform decision making about what to teach, how to teach, when to teach, and how to assess learning and teaching (Nunan, 1988; 1999). However, as Nunan (1999) points out that learners 'have to go through a process … of learning

how to learn … with the assistance and guidance of the teacher' as 'relatively few learners are naturally endowed with the ability to make informed choice' the minute they enter a learning course or program, regardless of what age group they are (*ibid.*, p. 11-12). Therefore, learner-centred teachers should systematically sensitize learners to the learning process and encourage them to gradually take greater responsibility' and move 'toward the fully autonomous end of the pedagogical continuum' with the support of appropriately developed curricula and materials (*ibid.*, p. 12).

Nunan's concept of learner-centred curriculum has provided valuable insight into the understanding of learner-centredness in language teaching. It serves as a guiding principle for curriculum development and teaching practice even in contexts where the curriculum is prescribed by the organization, as teachers make decisions at different levels about different aspects of teaching. At the level of classroom practice, Nunan's perspective on learner-centredness regarding the learning process provides practical guidance for teachers. From this perspective, learner-centredness refers to learners being the centre of the class, actively involved in the learning process, taking charge of their own learning processes, making decisions and plans and doing all the work, while teachers maximize the learning opportunities including opportunities for learners to interact (1999; 2004). Complementing Nunan's perspectives, Tudor's (1996) interpretation of learner-centredness is that language teaching first needs to acknowledge and work with language learners as complex and varied human beings, not just in individual terms but also in social and cultural terms. Second, it is an educational endeavour which seeks to empower learners by enabling them to assume an informed and self-directive role in the pursuance of their language-related life goals. Both Nunan and Tudor's perspectives emphasize the importance and central role of learner training or learner empowerment in learner-centred education.

Learner-centred education has become a widely-embraced endeavour in the language teaching community (e.g. Antón, 1999; Bao, 2013; Haley, 2004; Hanifehzadeh & Ebrahimi, 2015; Lee & Chen, 2010; Nosratinia, Gourabsari & Sarabchian, 2014; Rubin,

2010). As a guiding philosophy, it can be applied to different aspects of classroom teaching. Given its importance, it will be valuable and practical to bridge theory about learner-centredness with practice in the L2 teaching field, making this concept accessible and applicable to classroom practitioners and researchers. To this end, a comprehensive view of the L2 classroom is deemed necessary. The next section will conceptualize the L2 classroom from a holistic perspective, making it possible to synthesize and interpret what the literature has established about learner-centredness teaching and effective teaching across different dimensions.

2.2.2 Learner-centred conceptualization of the L2 classroom

Sociocultural theory holds that an individual's higher mental functioning and actions are derived from social life and are mediated by tools (technical tools) and signs (psychological tools) that have been historically and culturally created (Herazo & Donato, 2012; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991). Learning is 'a profoundly social process' in which the learners 'actively participate in their own learning within the supportive contexts of family and community' (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 131). It is through various types of tools and signs including language that individuals think and their understanding of the relationship with the world is mediated. Therefore, social interactions and the cultural context are of significant importance in human learning (Palincsar, 1998; Prawat, 1996; Woolfolk & Margetts, 2013). Sociocultural theory provides a lens for guiding L2 classroom practices and research, pointing to the importance of such factors as the classroom context(s), interaction and discourse.

From a sociocultural perspective, school-based language learning and teaching typically takes place in the context of a classroom, which is located in the school context and broader sociocultural and historical contexts. The learning process is influenced by various factors. The teacher, learners, tasks and contexts are identified by Williams and Burdon (1997) as the four key sets of factors. The teacher and learners are central to everything, through interaction with one another and with all the other elements, the

teacher and learners co-construct the learning experience. Tasks are defined as ‘any activity that learners engage in to further the process of learning a language’ (ibid, p. 168). Adapting this definition, this study will use activities and tasks interchangeably. Within the sociocultural and school context, the classroom context is of fundamental importance, especially the classroom learning environment and climate, which may either facilitate or constrain the learning process.

Expanding on Williams and Burdon’s framework, I emphasize four other dimensions of the classroom. First, classroom teaching cannot be isolated from the teaching content in textbooks or other materials. Therefore the content and resources, and more importantly, how teachers utilize these to facilitate learning, constitute an important factor in classroom teaching and learning. Second, throughout the whole teaching process, there is assessment going on, either by the teacher or by the learners. Therefore, assessment is an inevitable dimension to consider. Third, facilitating the development of learner thinking and learning strategies is also an important element where the long term goal of education is to develop life-long self-regulated or autonomous learners (Tudor, 1996; Nunan, 2001). Fourth, all the above elements are realized by the verbal and non-verbal interaction between the teacher and learners and among the learners. Therefore, classroom interaction and discourse is also an important dimension of a classroom, especially for language classrooms where the language is both the subject content and the medium for instruction. The following subsections synthesize and interpret what literature in general education and in language education has said about learner-centredness and effective teaching regarding these different dimensions of L2 classroom teaching.

2.2.2.1 Classroom environment and climate within the broader sociocultural context

The classroom context is ‘jointly constructed by participants and depend[s] upon the willingness of participants to cooperate in creating order together’ (Doyle, 2009, p. 158). To create enabling conditions for effective learning and teaching, teachers not only need to be informed by research and literature about effective classroom management (e.g.

McInerney & McInerney, 2010), but more importantly, they need to 'prioritize facilitative relationships', as 'the success of specific teaching practices is as much related to the practices themselves as to how they are tailored to respect the learners and relationships involved' (Cornelius-White & Harbaugh, 2010, p. xv). According to a recent meta-analysis, learner-centred interpersonal relationships and principles show above-average associations to students' success as compared to most other educational variables (Cornelius-White, 2007). These interpersonal qualities include trust, empathy, warmth, which are aligned with the humanistic view of the qualities that a facilitative teacher should have (Rogers 1969; 1983; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994).

The development of positive relationships and a facilitating climate within the classroom is of particular importance for language classrooms, as 'the mood, emotions, or climate sensed and shared by the class group' influences learners' willingness to communicate, which is an important factor influencing successful L2 acquisition (MacIntyre et al., 1998; Peng, 2012, p. 268). Learners' willingness to communicate is influenced by a range of factors, including language learning anxiety, self-confidence and motivation, and these are all influenced by the classroom interpersonal relationships, the attitudinal characteristics of the teacher towards the students, and the existence/absence of criticism and threat (Brown, 2014; Yan & Horwitz, 2008). Learner-centred teachers create a physically and mentally healthy, secure and inclusive environment where individual learners are respected, valued and empowered, learner participation and effort valued, peer interaction and collaboration facilitated.

The classroom environment and climate is shaped by and shapes the interaction of the teacher and learners with one another and with all the other elements throughout the whole process of teaching and learning. For example, the nature of classroom activities and tasks, the way the teacher organizes students' participation and interaction, the way the teacher asks questions and responds to students, the way the students are assessed and evaluated, all contribute to the nature of the classroom climate. These will be discussed in the subsequent sections.

2.2.2.2 Learning activities and tasks

Learner-centred teaching is not aligned with any specific way of teaching; rather, it implies openness to a variety of methods, approaches and insights. As Nunan (1991) pointed out over two decades ago:

> It has been realized that there never was and probably never will be a method for all, and the focus in recent years has been on the development of classroom tasks and activities which are consonant with what we know about second language acquisition, and which are also in keeping with the dynamics of the classroom itself (p. 228).

To better respond to learner needs in context, as Tudor (1996) recommends, teachers:

> seek to learn from the perspectives on language teaching contained in any method or approach, as well as from the insights teachers derive from their everyday teaching experience (p. 25).

Nunan's and Tudor's perspectives are consistent with the concept of principled eclecticism (Brown, 1994; 2014) and the post-method condition (Kumaravadivelu, 1994; 2006). The post-method condition rejects the contention that there is only one right way to teach or learn. It frees teachers from the bond of any specific method, empowering them to 'construct classroom-oriented theories of practice' and enables them to 'generate location-specific, classroom-oriented innovative practices' (Kumaravadivelu 1994, p. 29). Methodology is conceived as a 'synthetic undertaking', a set of choices and decisions that a teacher could make (Burns, Freeman & Edwards 2015). Therefore, learner-centred teachers use a variety of activities and tasks that are of appropriate challenge, relevance and interest to learners to engage the whole learner in active meaning-making, interaction, and thus significant learning.

2.2.2.3 Classroom interaction and discourse

Sociocultural theory holds that learning is as a 'socially constructed activity' and that cognitive development originates in social interaction (Cohen, 2011, p. 272; Vygotsky, 1978). In classroom settings learning occurs through interaction mediated primarily by speech in the learner's zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978). ZPD refers to:

> the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86)

According to Vygotsky, developmental levels are continuously changing and evolving and the learners' ZPDs can be continuously created and recreated through the interaction with and assistance of their peers and their teacher. The theory of ZPD points to the importance in the learning process of social interaction between the learner and more capable others, as well as the importance of scaffolding whereby more capable others provide necessary guidance and assistance to the learner (Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976; Woolfolk & Margetts, 2013).

Interaction 'enables simultaneous social, communicative, and academic development of students' (Hall, 2002, p. 78; Hall & Verplaetse, 2000). Interaction 'ascribes active roles to both teacher and student', makes learning 'a collaborative effort' with the teacher and students being partners (Cohen, 2011, p. 272). In the process of interaction the teacher and the students co-construct a shared understanding of their 'roles', 'relationships', the 'norms' and 'expectations' regarding their participation in class interaction and activities (Hall, 2002, p. 78).

From a linguistic perspective, interaction is of significant importance in language classrooms, as interactions maximize input and output of the target language, providing learners with opportunities to 'take risks', 'make mistakes', decompose and incorporate the target language structures into their own speech (Cohen, 2011, p. 272; Chaudron, 1988). Through the process from input to output, learners notice the gap between what they want to express and what they can express; testing out hypotheses, reflecting and modifying their language use (Swain, 1995).

The patterns of interaction a teacher uses in the classroom:

> socialize students into particular understandings of what counts as the official curriculum and of themselves as learners of that subject matter [who then] draw upon these patterns and norms to participate in subsequent classroom activities (Hall, 2002, p. 79).

Therefore, how a class progresses and how successfully the class achieves the teaching and learning objectives is to a large degree determined by the interaction that is constructed in the classroom (Tsui, 1995).

Classroom discourse – the 'oral interaction' that takes place in class, is 'especially consequential to the creation of learning environments and ultimately to the shaping of individual learners' development' (Hall, 2002, p. 78). Essential to all learning environments, classroom discourse plays an even more crucial role in foreign language classrooms because the language is both the subject and the primary medium of learning (Hall, 2002; Tsui, 1995). Teachers employ language as 'the main linguistic tool' and as 'a social and political tool' to promote classroom interaction, and to help learners to construct and move through their own ZPDs (Yoon & Kim, 2012, p. xix). In the process of scaffolding, teachers need to detect the learner's current developmental level and possible developing level, and assist the learner by

> giving information, prompts, reminders, and encouragement at the right time and in the right amounts, and then gradually allowing students to do more and more on their own (Woolfolk & Margetts, 2013, p. 99).

Language used in class affects the nature of classroom interaction, which in turn affects the availability of language learning opportunities and learners' language output opportunities (Tsui, 1995). The discursive features and the discourse patterns that a teacher adopts influences the nature and functions of teacher talk, which in turn either encourages or constrains students' participation, thereby maximizing or limiting learning opportunities. Some important discourse features include: explanation, questioning, feedback and error correction, turn allocation and discourse patterns, and these are now outlined.

Explanation, taking up a large proportion of teacher talk, is of essential importance for effective teaching and learning (Tsui, 1995). Explanation regarding the organization of a lesson is referred to as procedural explanation, while explanation regarding the subject content of a lesson is referred to as content explanation (ibid.). Whichever category, to

ensure that effective learning takes place, explanation should be clear, of appropriate amount and level of difficulty, engaging learners in an active process of knowledge and information transaction, building on prior learning and experience (ibid.).

Questioning is of particular importance for the creation of supportive conditions for comprehension and participation (Hall, 2002). The types of questions include open and closed questions, display and referential questions (Tsui, 1995). Different types of questions have different levels of cognitive demand and evoke different levels of engagement, thus affecting the kind of student response (Hall, 2002; Tsui, 1995). For example, some questions only elicit recalling of facts or ideas, some prompt 'relationship drawing between ideas', some prompt 'solution imagination for familiar problems' (Hall, 2002, p. 88). Teachers ask different kinds of questions for different purposes: to 'assist students during difficulties with complex classroom tasks', to help students 'maintain focus on the task', to guide students 'in practicing linguistic items', to facilitate students' communication and 'contributions to the interaction' using the target language, or assess students' progress (ibid., p. 88).

Feedback and error correction are also important classroom discourse features that influence the learning and interaction process. Feedback has multiple functions, ranging from acknowledging students' contribution to evaluating students' performance or response (Tsui, 1995). The nature and amount of feedback influence students learning. A facilitative teacher 'values every contribution and provides encouraging feedback', which will motivate students for more active learning and participation, and thus create a warm classroom climate (ibid., p. 30). Similarly, whether an error should be corrected, how, when and by whom also affects students' perception of the learning process. To facilitate learning, error correction should be based on knowledge about the learner's language competence and individual characteristics (ibid.).

Turn allocation is also an important feature which determines who is given the opportunity to speak and practice the target language, or to make a contribution and

participate in the classroom discourse (Hall, 1997). As turn allocation is a device with many functions, teachers allocate turns with different motivations and purposes: to focus students on a task, to 'avoid silence and embarrassment', to encourage participation, or to elicit a quick response to save class time (Tsui, 1995, p. 34). Regardless of purpose, teachers should be reflective and aware of their turn allocating pattern and make an effort to ensure that they involve every student, giving them relatively equal opportunities, as persistent uneven turn allocation will have a negative impact on the weak and shy students, who will be less willing to participate (ibid.).

Discourse pattern refers to the verbal interaction pattern taking place in the classroom. A typical classroom discourse pattern identified by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) is the IRF sequence: teacher initiation - learner response - teacher feedback. In the classroom, the discourse is normally initiated by the teacher, who then nominates a student to provide a response or an answer, followed by the teacher's feedback which is normally evaluative (Cohen, 2011; Nassaji & Wells, 2000). Strictly following this pattern might constrain students' opportunity to speak, think and learn. Research has shown that alternation to the IRF pattern or moves out of the strict IRF pattern create 'negotiation-rich' learning and thinking opportunity (Cohen, 2011; Zhang, 2009). These moves include: incorporating student-initiated questioning and turn allocation, having follow-up questions or moves after an IRF sequence.

In summary, classroom learning and teaching is influenced by a range of factors related to classroom interaction and discourse, such as the interaction and discourse patterns and the discourse features that teachers employ. Therefore, learner-centred teachers vary interaction and discourse patterns, using such discourse features as questioning and giving feedback effectively to facilitate students' participation, practice, and interaction, thereby maximizing students' opportunity to speak, think, and learn.

2.2.2.4 Learning strategies and learner thinking

The ultimate goal of learner-centred education can be interpreted as to develop

self-directive or autonomous life-long learners who are capable of choosing learning directions, setting practical short term and long term goals, achieving their goals through self-discipline and using a repertoire of cognitive and metacognitive strategies. This goal of learner-centred education is evident in such frequently recurring concepts as learner choice, decision making, taking responsibility, self-directed learning, self-discipline, self–assessment, developing learning skills. Therefore, an important dimension of learner-centredness lies in the emphasis on learner empowerment, building students' autonomy and responsibility. This process of empowerment is referred to as learner training by Tudor (1996), a process to help learners to:

> grow into their self-directive role by means of a critical assessment of their current beliefs and attitudes, accompanied by the acquisition of a body of knowledge and study techniques which will allow them to manage their learning in an insightful and self-directive manner (p. 34-35).

This points to the importance of the development of learning strategies and learner thinking in learner-centred education.

Learning strategies are 'goal-directed actions that are used by learners to mediate their own learning' (Hall, 2002, p. 92). Strategies are traditionally grouped into three categories: metacognitive, cognitive and socio-affective strategies (O'Malley et al., 1985a; 1985b). These strategies are further illustrated with examples by Hall (2002):

- *Metacognitive strategies*: previewing, planning, sequencing, monitoring, assessing, and revising one's performance.
- *Cognitive strategies*: grouping, classifying, using dictionaries and other external resources, notetaking, visually representing the material, rehearsing, forming hypotheses and testing them out.
- *Socio-affective strategies*: asking for clarification, repetition, imitation, circumlocution, cooperation and engaging in private speech (p. 93).

Closely related to learning strategy is learner thinking. According to the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001, p. 64-69), thinking is classified into six categories:

1. *Remembering*: Involving recognizing, retrieving and recalling factual, conceptual, procedural or metacognitive knowledge from long-term memory
2. *Understanding*: Constructing meaning from instructional messages, being able to give interpretations, exemplifications, classifications, summarization, inference, comparison, and explanations
3. *Applying*: Carrying out, executing or implementing a procedure in a given situation
4. *Analyzing*: Breaking material into constituent parts and then determining the relationships among different parts and between different parts and the overall structure or purpose through differentiating, organizing and attributing
5. *Evaluating*: Checking, critiquing and then making judgments based on criteria and standards
6. *Creating*: Reorganizing elements into a new pattern or structure to form a coherent or functional whole through generating, planning, or producing

Remembering is a process that 'promotes retention' of the presented knowledge, and it is 'essential for meaningful learning and problem solving as the knowledge is used for more complex tasks' (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001, p. 66). However, the other five categories, from understanding to creating, promote knowledge transfer. Among these, understanding accounts for the largest category of 'transfer-based educational objectives in schools and college' (ibid., p. 70). Therefore, the other categories of thinking: applying, analysing, evaluating and creating should be encouraged more to facilitate transfer of learning.

Training learners in skills about how to learn, how to monitor one's learning, how to think or approach a problem will equip them with better ability to 'exploit classroom learning opportunities effectively', to 'continue with language learning outside of the classroom', and to solve problems in study and life (Wong & Nunan, 2011, p. 144). Therefore, learner-centred teachers empower learners to be effective and self-directive learners by incorporating opportunities in the language learning process to facilitate the development of learning strategy and learner thinking, especially higher-order thinking (Cohen, 1998; Nunan, 1999; Wenden, 2002).

2.2.2.5 Assessment

Assessment is a process of 'gathering and interpreting information about a student's performance to determine mastery' of the student toward the pre-determined learning objectives (Marshall, 2005, p. 2). Assessment has multiple functions, for example, helping teachers to diagnose and evaluate students' strengths and weaknesses, to make judgements about the effectiveness of learning and teaching, to measure students' improvement over time, to motivate students or to rank them for selection purposes (Stiggins, 1992; Taras, 2005). A well-designed assessment is a systematic evaluating process that enables teachers to gather evidence about and reflect on how learning is best facilitated to further improve teaching (Büyükkarcı, 2014).

Assessment is normally categorized into two types: summative and formative assessment. Summative assessment is referred to as assessment of learning (Earl, 2003; Stiggins, 2002), which is usually conducted at the end of a unit of teaching, a school term or a course to measure how well a student has accomplished the learning objectives. Formative assessment is referred to as assessment for learning, ongoing assessment, or dynamic assessment (Stiggins, 2002). Formative assessment occurs in the process of teaching and learning, with the goal of helping students to continue the learning and developing process by providing them with 'appropriate feedback on performance' (Brown, 2004, p. 6.)

Assessment can be formal and informal (Brown, 2004). Formal assessments are 'exercises or procedures specifically designed to tap into a storehouse of skills and knowledge'. They are 'systematic, planned sampling techniques constructed to give the teacher and the student an appraisal of student achievement' (ibid., p. 6). Informal assessment abounds throughout classroom teaching, usually embedded in classroom tasks and teacher questioning. The purpose is to 'elicit performance without recording results and making fixed judgments about a students' competence (ibid., p. 5). Informal assessment can take a number of forms, starting with incidental, unplanned comments and responses, along with coaching and other impromptu feedback to the student (ibid.,

p. 5).

Teachers' assessment practices, together with other factors, have a significant influence on learning as:

> Assessment defines what students regard as important, how they spend their time and how they come to see themselves as students and then as graduates . . . If you want to change student learning then change the methods of assessment. (Brown et al., 1997, p. 7)

It conditions students to 'adopt either surface or deep approaches to their learning' (Gibbs, 1992, p. 2). The following are practices and/or characteristics regarding assessment that facilitate learners' deep approach to learning:

- offer realistic workload expectation of students
- provide clear assessment criteria which are known by the students beforehand
- are 'non-threatening and non-anxiety provoking'
- involve students input in the design of the assessment and in negotiating criteria
- provide regular and frequent formative feedback at intervals
- allow students choice of assessment task
- incorporate self and peer assessment (ibid., p. 10-11).

In summary, learner-centred teachers use diverse and varied forms of assessment that have realistic expectations, incorporate formative assessment, learner input, choices, self and peer assessment and support learners in the learning and assessment preparation process.

2.2.2.6 Content and resources

Guided by learner-centred philosophy, the selection and adaptation of content and resources are to be based on well-informed understanding of learner needs and characteristics (Nunan, 1999). A wide variety of resources and input is to be used to cater for learner differences and needs and to facilitate active learning and self-discovery, incorporating learner input and external resources (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994). The content of teaching is to be used as a means to facilitate the development of students' learning and thinking skills, rather than merely a body of knowledge for

teaching (Weimer, 2002; 2012). Therefore, teaching for real learning and development is considered more important than covering the content itself.

2.2.3 Summary

This section has reviewed the origin and development of learner-centredness in L2 education. It has bridged theories and practices about learner-centredness in general education with L2 literature, in which the L2 classroom is conceptualized from a holistic perspective. The review shows that L2 classroom teaching is a complicated process, involving a wide range of factors across different dimensions, each of which plays a significant role in constituting effective teaching and learning. The interaction of all the above interrelated and integrated elements influences learning outcomes, which then further affects the on-going interaction of these elements, thus affecting the learning process. Any specific aspect of teaching and learning practice needs to be understood within the comprehensive picture of the classroom. This comprehensive view of classroom teaching is conceptualized in Figure 2.3, which captures the dynamic and interrelated relationship of the key elements of a classroom.

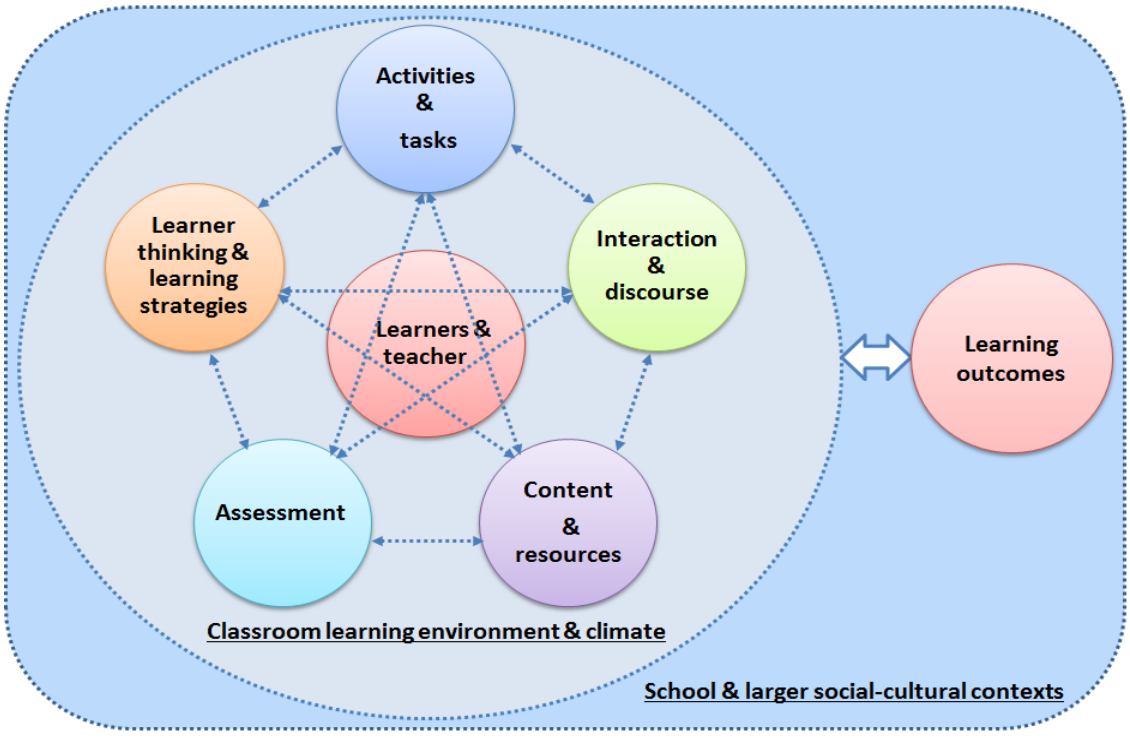


Figure 2.3 Learner-centred conceptualization of L2 classroom teaching

For the purpose of this study, and based on the comprehensive review of L2 literature and learner-centred literature, learner-centredness is defined as L2 teachers basing pedagogical and curriculum decisions on the best available knowledge and information about effective L2 learning and teaching and about the learners, tailoring teaching to cater for learners' overall development and needs, and facilitating maximal interaction, sharing, cooperation, and meaning making and co-construction in the learning process. In a learner-centred L2 classroom, teachers create and co-construct a positive and optimal learning environment and climate, which minimizes learners' affective filter, whilst maximizing their motivation, interaction, active participation and engagement. Such a learning environment could not be achieved without good coordination of the other five dimensions of classroom teaching: namely careful choice and effective organization of meaningful and engaging classroom activities and tasks, well-scaffolded and maximized classroom interaction with effective choice and use of interaction and discourse features, thoughtfully planned and well-integrated opportunities to facilitate the development of learning strategies and learner thinking, effective use of assessment to facilitate learning, as well as effective use of textbooks and resources to enrich and facilitate learning. For the purpose of this study, and based on the literature review so far, effective teaching refers to teaching practices that:

- create a positive and secure learning environment with minimum external criticism and threat, which is conducive to learners' willingness to communicate and participate
- make learning relevant, interesting, meaningful, challenging yet developmentally appropriate
- facilitate active thinking, participation, interaction, engagement, and reflection
- maximize opportunities for language input, practice and output
- facilitate the development of learners' overall language ability, learning and thinking ability, creativity, and ability to make choices and take responsibility for learning
- allow adequate time for contemplation and processing of new information
- are responsive to learner needs and feedback.

To understand teachers and teaching, a comprehensive conceptualization of the

classroom is essential. Moreover, teachers are not to be judged based on their observed practices. Instead, their thinking needs to be studied and their voices heard in order to provide better understanding and fair representation. Therefore, the next section reviews literature regarding teacher thinking and beliefs.

2.3 Teacher beliefs

This section has two aims: (1) to provide an overview of teacher thinking research in education in general and in second language or foreign language (L2) education in particular; (2) to examine the current status of studies on L2 teacher beliefs, thereby identifying research gaps or areas that need further investigation. To achieve these aims, this section first outlines the origin and development of research on teacher thinking in education in general, followed by the development of teacher thinking research in language education. It then reviews literature on teacher beliefs in second/foreign language education. The review reveals a shortage of studies that integrally investigate L2 teachers' overall educational beliefs and actual classroom teaching practices.

2.3.1 Origin and development of teacher thinking research

Due to the influence of behaviourist psychology, educational research prior to the mid-1970s was dominated by a 'process-product paradigm', aiming to study how and what teacher behaviours led to student learning (Verloop et al., 2001, p. 441; also Freeman, 2002; Xing, 2009). Within this paradigm, teachers were viewed as 'mechanical implementers' enacting externally prescribed practices (Borg, 2006, p. 7). Teaching was understood as what could be externally observed, while teacher thinking processes about and within interactions and behaviours were overlooked (Burns, Freeman & Edwards, 2015). Since the mid-1970s, teachers have been increasingly recognized as taking a central role in shaping curriculum and educational processes, while teaching has been viewed as decision making (Borg, 2006; Burns, Freeman & Edwards, 2015; Cundale, 2001). This recognition led to a shift in the educational research paradigm, with increasing importance given to teachers' experience and mental

lives. At this early stage of the shift however, researchers primarily focused on teachers' planning, judgements and decision-making, mainly investigating these issues from the outside rather than probing teachers' perspectives (Borg, 2006). It was not until the 1990s that teachers were widely believed to 'possess access to unique knowledge about teaching' and therefore their voice was given more importance (Freeman, 2002, p. 8).

2.3.2 L2 teacher thinking

Even though teacher thinking research had been well established in the educational field in general in the early 1990s, it was still in its infancy in language education, especially L2 education (Borg, 2003; 2006). Little was known about 'what the second language teacher brings to the process of second language learning' and 'the role of the teacher has remained a relatively peripheral component in language teaching research' (Wood, 1996, p. 2). Subsequently, research interests in language teacher cognition started to grow, as is evident in Borg's (2006) review of work published from 1976 to 2006. The majority of the 180 studies identified were published since the mid-1990s. These studies were dominated by research on teachers of English as the first or second language, conducted mainly in the US, with only a small number of studies conducted in the other countries such as UK, Hong Kong, and Australia. The contexts where English is a foreign language were under-researched. However, since Borg's review, teachers of English as a foreign language have received increased attention and research on language teacher thinking has been conducted in a wider range of geographic contexts (over 30 countries) including: Asian countries such as China (Li, L., 2011; Li et al., 2011), Iran (Baleghizadeh & Moghadam, 2013) and Japan (Nishino, 2012), European countries such as Holland (Graus & Coppen, 2016), Turkey (İnceçay, 2015) and Greece (Mattheoudakis, 2007), South American countries such as Colombia (Kim, 2014) and Chile (D ́az et al., 2013), and African countries such as Algeria (Bellalem, 2008).

2.3.3 L2 teacher beliefs

Research on language teacher thinking has focused and examined different aspects of

teacher thinking using various concepts. Initially the focus was on: ‘theories of practice’ (Burns, 1996), ‘maxims’ (Richards, 1996), ‘beliefs, assumption, and knowledge’ (Wood, 1996), moving to ‘pedagogical principles’ (Breen et al., 2001), ‘teacher knowledge’ (Verloop et al., 2001) and ‘personal practical knowledge’ (Connelly et al., 1997; Tsang, 2004). More recently, research has focused on concepts such as ‘cognition‘ (Barnard & Burns, 2012; Borg, 2006; Burri, 2015), ‘perceptions’ (Wang, 2007), ‘pedagogic knowledge’ (Akbari & Tajik, 2009), ‘conceptions’ (Yilmaz & Sahin, 2011), ‘values’ (Court, Merav & Ornan, 2009), ‘teaching mind’ (Burns, Freeman & Edwards, 2015) and ‘philosophies’ (Crookes, 2015).

Among all the concepts mentioned above, ‘belief’ and ‘knowledge’ are the most often used (Borg, 2006). These two concepts are hard to distinguish and ‘seem to be inseparable’ (Clandinin & Connelly, 1987; Pajares, 1992; Verloop et al., 2001). Nevertheless, ‘beliefs are seen roughly as referring to personal values, attitudes, and ideologies, and knowledge to a teacher’s more factual propositions’ (Verloop et al., 2001, p. 446). For the purpose of this study, beliefs are distinguished from the factual knowledge that a teacher has. Beliefs are defined as ‘an individual’s judgment of the truth or falsity of a proposition’ (Pajares, 1992, p. 316). They are ‘evaluative’, ‘consciously or unconsciously held’, and ‘imbued with emotive commitment’; serving as ‘a guide to thought and behaviour’ (Borg, 2001, p. 186). Teacher beliefs reflect personal values, ideologies and philosophies of teaching (Richards, 1996; Verloop et al., 2001), and therefore influence all aspects of teaching, including aims of teaching, task selection, content interpretation, student evaluation, and classroom interaction (Breen et al., 2001; Pajares 1992).

Research on L2 teacher beliefs since Borg’s (2006) review covers topics ranging from general beliefs about language learning and teaching (e.g. Barrot, 2016; Kissau et al., 2014) to beliefs about a wide variety of subject specific areas. For example, teacher beliefs regarding grammar teaching (e.g. Liviero, 2017; Underwood, 2012), vocabulary teaching (Macalister, 2012), corrective feedback (Rahimi & Zhang, 2015),

pronunciation (Shah et al., 2017), questioning (Pham & Hamid, 2013), assessment (Bullock, 2011; Muñoz et al., 2012), communicative language teaching (Kim, 2014; Park, 2012) and learner autonomy (King & Rothman, 2017).

However, the majority of the studies focus mainly on beliefs only, sometimes together with reported practice; they use questionnaires or interviews as the primary data collection tools. For example, Altan (2012) used a questionnaire to investigate the beliefs about language learning of 217 pre-service EFL teachers studying in state universities in Turkey. The study shows that the participants held a variety of beliefs about language learning and that some of these may impede successful language learning and teaching. Therefore, the study calls for teachers to endeavour to become aware of their beliefs and the potential influence that such beliefs may have on language learning and teaching. This study also urges teacher education programmes to facilitate pre-service teachers' belief development by encouraging them to explore their beliefs and by challenging their unrealistic beliefs or misconceptions with new information and knowledge.

For another example, in Colombia, Muñoz et al., (2012) studied 62 tertiary EFL teachers' beliefs and reported practice regarding assessment, using surveys, written reports, and interviews. The results indicate contradictory relationships between what teachers say they do and what they believe, thus suggesting the need for more opportunities for teacher to reflect, conduct self-assessment, interact with each other and share experiences. It also highlights the need to support teachers in their practice regarding formative assessment,

In the context of Chinese curriculum reform, Zhang & Liu (2014) conducted a mixed-method study on junior high school English teachers' beliefs about language teaching. The study involved a survey of 733 teachers from ten provinces/municipalities and individual interviews with nine of those teachers. The results show that teachers hold multidimensional beliefs which may seem contradictory – some aligned with

traditional ideas about language teaching, others aligned with the constructive ideas underpinning the reform. This study suggests the need to investigate and address the reasons for the inconsistency between teachers' beliefs and the ideas underpinning the curriculum innovation.

These studies add to the understanding of the various beliefs that teachers hold, suggesting the crucial importance of taking account of their pre-existing conceptions in educational reform and innovations. Nevertheless, beliefs 'can only be inferred from a collective understanding of what human beings say, intend, and do' (Pajares, 1992, p. 316). Teachers vary in their ability to express their beliefs (Senior, 2006); also the reported practice may not be a true representation of their real practice. Therefore, in order to better understand teachers and teaching, Borg (2006) calls for more research studies to integrally investigate teacher beliefs and practices. Studies adopting this approach since then have added to the evidence that beliefs have a strong impact on classroom practices, giving insight into the factors that influence teachers' beliefs, decision making, and practice (e.g. Basturkmen, 2012; Farrell & Bennis, 2013; Kuzborska, 2011). For example, Farrell and Bennis (2013) conducted a case study investigating and comparing teachers' beliefs and practices regarding grammar teaching. Data were collected using a survey, observations and interviews involving one experienced and one novice English teacher. The findings indicate that teachers' hold a range of complex beliefs, which do not always align with their practices, with the experienced teacher's classroom practices more clearly related to his beliefs. The interviews enabled the exploration of factors that might have influenced the misalignment, including perceived student needs, expectations and preferences and time constraints. Similar studies identified other factors influencing the misalignment between teacher beliefs and practices, including curriculum requirements, society, parents, school administration (Barnard & Scampton, 2008; Fleming, Bangou & Fellu, 2011); high stakes examinations and perceived content-specific teaching efficacy (Nishino, 2012). This cohort of studies points to the non-linear, interactive and

reciprocal relationships between teacher beliefs and practices, the incongruities between them and the importance of exploring factors influencing the incongruities. These studies also highlight the significance of facilitating teachers' reflection and articulation of their educational beliefs.

However, the volume of studies integrally investigating teacher beliefs and actual practices remains relatively low as compared to belief-only studies. Moreover, there is a dearth of literature that studies in detail L2 teachers' overall educational beliefs in relation to their overall classroom practices. Most of these studies focus only on teacher beliefs and practices about specific areas, such as reading (Farrell & Ives, 2015; Karimi & Dehghani, 2016), culture and/or intercultural competence (Baleghizadeh & Moghadam, 2013; Tian, 2013), writing (Yang & Gao, 2013) and grammar (Çapan, 2014). Some of these studies simply try to identify whether a correlation exists between teachers' specific beliefs and practices, for example the relationship between teachers' beliefs about student-centredness and their technology practices (Qasem, 2010). Some studies explore the correlation of certain factors with teacher beliefs and practices, for example, the influence of school culture on teacher beliefs and practices (Hongboontri & Keawkhong, 2014), the effect of teachers' apprenticeship of observation on their beliefs and practices (Fagan, 2011), and the relationship between beliefs regarding teaching spoken English and teachers' characteristics (Goh & Chen, 2014). Some explore the effect on practice of a specific area of belief, for example, the effect of teachers' language learning beliefs on their practice (İnceçay, 2011).

Li (2013) and Zheng (2013) are two exceptions to these studies, both of which are conducted in China in the context of the National Curriculum Reform. Li (2013) investigates the exact relationship of teachers' overall beliefs and practices through unveiling the moment-by-moment decision making of the teacher. Chosen out of the 18 cases of a project, this single case study explores 'every aspect' of the 'espoused beliefs' to fully capture the complexity of a senior secondary teacher's views as well as the relationship between teacher beliefs and observed practices. The participant is a top

expert teacher in the city working in one of the best state secondary schools in Beijing. Data collection tools included two semi-structured interviews to gauge the teacher's beliefs, video recording of a unit of lessons (180 minutes) to investigate the teacher's practices, and a video-based stimulated recall interview to explore the teacher's interpretation and understanding of what was happening at a series of chosen stretches of interaction in the video. Li found that the teacher's interactive decision making was primarily influenced by various factors such as the students' character and level of experience, the teacher's prioritized pedagogical goal, lack of cultural knowledge and self-perceived responsibility for students to learn something useful. Li highlights the importance of situating the issue in social acts and investigating them in a more interactive manner.

Using the same data collection methods involving six EFL teachers from five secondary schools, Zheng (2013) explored relationship between Chinese EFL teachers' general beliefs about teaching/learning and their practice. This study observed teachers' adoption of an eclectic approach in their practice to cater for different teaching aims, which explains for the misalignment of practice with beliefs. It also suggests that teachers vary in their understanding of the curriculum standards and that teachers lack support in establishing 'theoretically supported notions' as well as 'first-hand experience of the effectiveness of these notions in promoting immediate learning outcomes' (p. 192). Furthermore, this study theorizes teachers' belief systems as complex, dynamic and interactive, in which their core and peripheral beliefs interact with one another in different teaching contexts, with their core beliefs playing a more important role than their periphery beliefs in influencing their practices.

2.3.4 Summary

This section has reviewed the literature regarding teacher thinking in general education and teacher belief in L2 education in particular. Based on the review, three comments can be made. First, although research interest in L2 teacher belief has increased, a

majority of studies focus only on beliefs, and only a few include reported practices. Second, the volume of research studies that integrally investigate teacher beliefs and actual practices remain low. Third, a majority of such studies focus on specific content areas, or specific aspects of teacher beliefs. Research studies dedicated to comprehensive understanding of teachers' overall beliefs and practices are rare. Nevertheless, teachers have educational beliefs about various aspects, therefore, their beliefs about one specific aspect cannot be understood in isolation. This study will focus on teachers' overall educational beliefs and how these relate to their practices in the language classroom.

2.4 Chapter summary

This chapter has reviewed the literature regarding learner-centred language teaching and teacher beliefs. To clarify the contemporary meaning of LC, an outline of the origin and development of child-centred education was provided, as it is from here that LC evolved. There followed an examination of humanistic views of education and Rogers' person-centred model, which is the foundation of LC. The contemporary meaning of LC was presented and illustrated with support of learner-centred psychological principles as well as practical examples. Having clarified the meaning of LC, Section 2.2 connected LC with language education, outlining the origin, development and interpretations of LC in this field. It then provided a comprehensive view of L2 classrooms with reference to the literature, especially L2 literature. In Section 2.3, research into teacher thinking was reviewed to provide a foundation for the subsequent review of L2 teacher beliefs, which then revealed a shortage of studies that integrally investigate L2 teachers' overall educational beliefs and actual classroom teaching practices.

The question of what to research and why has already been established in Chapter 1 and this chapter. The next questions to consider are how to approach this research project. The methodological issue of 'how' and 'why' will be addressed in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3 Research methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology for this project investigating Chinese secondary EFL teachers' beliefs and practices through a lens of learner-centredness. It first provides a discussion of the research orientation, explaining why the research paradigm of social constructivism is used as the theoretical framework for the study (Section 3.1). This is followed by an explanation for choosing a qualitative multiple-case study design (Section 3.2). Having justified the overall design of the study, the selection of participants (Section 3.3), the data collection methods and processes (Section 3.4) are described, followed by the details of the data management and initial analysis (Section 3.5). As a core tool for in-depth analysis a framework of learner-centredness was developed, including matrices (Section 3.6). The subsequent data analysis process id then detailed (Section 3.7), followed by a discussion of ethical considerations (Section 3.8) and the trustworthiness of the study (Section 3.9).

3.1 Research orientation

This is a qualitative study based on an interpretive paradigm using social constructivism as a theoretical framework, which emphasizes the 'socially constructed nature of reality' and the co-construction of understanding by the researcher and the researched as situated in a specific context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 14). A paradigm is understood here as 'a way of looking at the world' (Punch, 2014, p. 14), 'a worldview that defines, for its holder, the nature of "the world", the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationships to the world and its parts' (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 107). The 'inquiry paradigm' or 'the interpretive framework' guiding the action of the researcher is grounded in and thus reflects the researcher's philosophical stance regarding epistemology, ontology and methodology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Punch 2014, p. 14).

The prolonged paradigm debate over quantitative and qualitative research began in the 1960s, when qualitative inquiry was gaining increasing acceptance, challenging the dominant position of quantitative methods in social science research (Punch, 2014). Proponents of positivism, which underpins quantitative research, assume 'an objective universe' that is 'independent of human perceptions', 'reality exists and is driven by universal, natural laws', and the 'product of research is verifiable knowledge in the forms of facts, theories, and laws' (Hatch & Barclay-McLaughlin 2006, p. 498-499). Positivist researchers believe that their research work can be conducted in a 'value-free framework', emphasizing the 'measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables', rather than the processes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 14). In contrast, proponents of interpretivism, which underpins qualitative research, uphold the 'value-laden nature of inquiry', believing in 'multiple realities' and individual subjectivities, these researchers locate themselves in the world and take a naturalistic approach to study action or phenomena in their natural setting, discovering the meanings that people bring to the actions or phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Flick, 2009, p. 69).

The ongoing debate demands the constant 'reconceptualization of research itself', its 'purposes', 'place and role', and 'context' (Punch, 2014, p. 16). Qualitative researchers argue that positivist methods are but one way of knowing the world, while some contend that the positivist methods 'reproduce only a certain kind of science, a science that silences too many voices' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 15-16). The critique of positivism has brought about the development of a range of different alternative paradigms, to name some: post-positivism, critical theory, (social) constructionism, and transformativism (Connole, Smith & Wiseman, 1993; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Mertens, 2005; Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). To position myself in the paradigm debate, like many other researchers, rather than dwelling on defending the epistemological and philosophical standpoints one upholds, I concur with 'a paradigm of choices' advocated by Patton (1990, p. 38-39). Proposing 'methodological appropriateness' as the 'primary

criterion for judging methodological quality', this advocacy emphasizes the appropriateness of each approach or combination of approaches to address a specific research problem or task (Patton, 1990, p. 38-39; also Baum, 1995; Flick, 2009; Silverman, 2009; Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). I also agree with the critical realists who, on the one hand, agree with the positivists that there exists external reality that is independent of human conceptions and, on the other hand, uphold that 'society is made up of thinking and reflective human beings' and therefore it is of crucial importance to understand the significance and meanings people attach to actions and events and their interpretation of the world (Danermark et al., 2002, p. 200).

This research study is framed by the social constructivist worldview which holds assumptions that 'realities are local, specific and constructed; they are socially and experientially based, and depend on the individuals or groups holding them' (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 109-111) and that individuals develop varied and multiple subjective meanings of their experiences 'through interaction with others' and 'through historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals' lives' (Creswell, 2013, p. 25). Guided by the social constructivist worldview and paradigm, this research is qualitative, interpretive and naturalistic, with the goal being to 'document and interpret as fully as possible the totality of whatever is being studied in a particular context from the people's viewpoint or frame of reference (Leininger, 1985, p. 5). Giving voice to participants, this research asks questions that encourage reflection and insight, exploring teachers' beliefs and probing issues that lie beneath the surface of their teaching practices (Cohen et al., 2011). As such, this study not only pays careful attention to what the participants say or do but also focuses on the 'specific contexts in which they live and work, in order to understand the historical and cultural settings' and the participants' background information (Creswell, 2013, p. 25). In making sense of and interpreting the meanings that the participants have about the world, I understand that my own personal, cultural, and historical experiences and values have shaped the research process (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009).

3.2 Research design

This research adopts a multiple-case study design to study in depth individual Chinese secondary EFL teachers in naturally occurring circumstances, starting from their expressional and teaching practices and following on to an interpretation of these in their specific context (Flick, 2009; Simons, 2009). Under the umbrella term of qualitative research, a whole range of strategies and designs is possible to suit the needs of different paradigms. Among a range of designs which suit the interpretive paradigm, such as ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, and case studies design (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Marshall & Rossman, 2015), case study research design was chosen because it best facilitates in-depth investigation of a research phenomenon or issue, capturing its 'particularity and complexity', covering a broad range of contextual and other complex conditions (Creswell, 2008; Stake, 1995; Moore et al., 2012; Yin, 2009, 2012). Case study research is suitable for investigating a single case or small number of cases (Yin, 2012, p. 4), where a case is regarded as a 'whole unit as it exists in its real-life context' (Johnson & Christensen, 2012, p. 49). Multiple-case design refers to case study research which involves the extensive study of a number of cases in order to develop a deeper and better understanding of the phenomenon or issues under investigation, with more extensive descriptions and explanations of the situation (Chmiliar, 2010). Compared to a single case study, multiple-case designs produce greater confidence in the findings (Yin, 2012), as they demonstrate the phenomenon or issues across a more varied range of circumstances. Therefore the generalizability of multiple-case studies is enhanced relative to a single case (Chmiliar, 2010; Yin, 2012). Be it a single case study or a multiple case study, to enhance the 'analytic' generalization of the research findings derived from case study approach, data collection and analysis procedures need to be systematically carried out (Yin, 2012, p. 6). These are described in the following sections.

3.3 Selection of participants

A purposive sampling procedure was used to select research sites and participants relevant to the research questions (Bryman, 2012, p. 418-419). As the purpose of this study was to uncover the complexity of teachers' practices and beliefs regarding EFL teaching in 'ordinary' secondary schools that use the national curriculum in the Southwest of China, the widely recognized elite schools were excluded. In addition, a 'maximal variation principle' was used within the selected research site to sample teachers who differ in some characteristics such as sex, age and teaching experience (Creswell, 2013; Wiersma, 2000). However, the recruitment of participants was complex as I was in Australia, far away from the designated research sites. Three urban secondary schools in a province in Southwest of China were approached by my friends on my behalf with information letters. However, the original plan for video recording the classroom teaching process seems to have concerned the principals and school leaders, who then politely refused. Realizing that the main hindrance was the video-recording of the classroom teaching, I decided to only audio record the classroom teaching. Even with this adjustment, the three schools refused to participate. Subsequently, a secondary school in a neighbouring province agreed to participate in the project. The information letter to the principal (Appendix 2) and letter of invitation to teachers (Appendix 3) were emailed to the principal, who, being outward looking and supportive, believed that participating in this kind of research project would ultimately benefit the school and facilitate the development of the teachers.

This study planned to recruit only eight participants to make the research project manageable lest it became cumbersome and result in superficial perspectives (Creswell, 2013). The objectives were to present a 'holistic interpretation of the natural settings' and the complexity of the information provided by individuals (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009, p. 14). However, the principal of this school proposed to involve all of the ten English

teachers in the Junior High school sector. Seeing the supportive and enthusiastic attitude of the principal, I felt obliged to take this advice. However, I soon realized that the group was stereotyped, all being females over 40, running counter to the principle of maximum variation within the same school. Thereupon, a second school in the same city was approached and agreed to participate. Aware of the considerable time that collecting qualitative data and analysing it would take, the ensuing decision was to only recruit eight participants, ideally four from each school.

A briefing meeting was held with the principals in both schools and the teachers who had been selectively recommended in line with my request of maximum variation possibility. The principals signed the letter of permission to conduct the research study (see appendix 4) on the spot, and then each teacher was presented with an informed consent form to participate (see appendix 5), which was then collected at the end of the meeting. Three teachers from the first school and five teachers from the second school signed up to participate.

The data collection process initially involved these eight teachers. However, one teacher from the first school decided not to participate in the stimulated recall interview, which led to the exclusion of her dataset. Thus this data collection process was completed with seven teachers, two from School One and five from School Two. The seven participants are all females, aged from late 20s to early 50s. For ethical consideration, pseudonyms with the initials from A to G are used for the seven participants (Anli, Bailin, Chen, Dongmei, Enya, Fang, Guiyun, with just the initial letter used in the tables), and pseudonyms with the initial of X and Y are used for the two schools (Xihua Secondary School and Yizhi Secondary School). Fang and Guiyun, the older two of the seven participants, are from Yizhi Middle School, while the other five, Anli, Bailin, Chen, Enya, and Duan are from Xihua Middle School. All the participants hold a Bachelor

Degree relevant to English literature or English education except Chen, who has a Bachelor Degree in Tourism Management. They have a teaching history ranging from 7 to 33 years. The basic information about the seven participants is summarized in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Basic information about the participants

School	**Xihua Secondary School**					**Yizhi Secondary School**	
Participant	Anli	Bailin	Chen	Dongmei	Enya	Guiyun	Fang
Age	35-40	30-35	30-35	35-40	25-30	50-55	45-50
Highest Degree	BA in TESOL	BA in TESOL	BA in Tourism Management	BA in English Literature	BA in TESOL	BA in English Literature	BA in English Literature
Year Level	Year 8	Year 7	Year 7 & 9	Year 9	Year 7	Year 9	Year 8

3.4 Data collection methods and process

This section outlines the data collection process over a period of three months, using pre-lesson interviews, classroom observations, post-lesson conversational interviews and stimulated recall interviews, documents, field notes and research diaries (for details see Table 3.2). The rationale for each data collection method is explained, followed by details about how the methods were enacted.

Table 3.2 Outline of research instruments in relation to research questions

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">Research Questions</th><th colspan="2">Research Instruments</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">1. What are teachers' espoused educational beliefs?
2. How do their beliefs align with learner-centredness?
3. What factors influence teachers' beliefs?</td><td>▪ Pre-lesson Interview (1.5hr)</td><td rowspan="3">▪ Documents
− National, local and school documents and policies
− Curriculum Standards
− Exam papers
− Textbooks
− Supporting teaching materials/ resources
− Lesson plans
− Teacher handouts
− Students' homework
▪ Research diaries
▪ Field notes and audio recordings</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">4. What are the features of teachers' teaching practices?
5. How do their practices align with learner-centredness?</td><td>▪ Classroom observations (5 x 45 mins)
− environment/atmosphere
− discipline/management
− organization/activities (nature)
− students' participation
− group/pair work
− questioning/error correction
− giving feedback
− turn taking</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">6. How do teachers' practices align with their beliefs?
7. What factors influence the alignment or misalignment?</td><td>▪ Post-lesson conversational interviews (10 mins /observation)
− discussion about lesson plans, what, how, and why
− evaluate how the plan has changed and why
− discuss critical incidents and in-classroom decision-making
▪ Stimulated Recall Interview (1.5 hr)
− clarify critical incidents
− identify factors influencing in-classroom decision-making and behaviors
− elicit underlying beliefs and assumptions</td></tr>
</table>

3.4.1 Pre-observation interview

The data collection process began with a pre-lesson interview of about 1.5 hours with each participant. These qualitative interviews consisted of open-ended questions to

obtain detailed information about the teachers' 'thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, reasoning, motivations and feelings' about topics relevant to ESL teaching (Johnson & Christensen, 2012, p. 202). The interviews enabled the participants to discuss their teaching in their specific contexts (i. e. 'the world in which they live') and probe their perceptions about the situation and about their teaching practice (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 666). This process took the interview guide approach (Johnson & Christensen, 2012), with a plan to explore specific topics, asking specific open-ended questions. The wording and order of the questions were altered as necessary to make the interviews fairly conversational and situational. An interview protocol was used, mainly drawing upon the teacher beliefs survey and teacher classroom practice survey developed by Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory (McREL, cited in McCombs & Whisler, 1997). The protocol consisted of 34 items that fall into nine sections (See Appendix 6), including a first section to collect the biographic data from the teachers and eight sections with questions probing teachers' beliefs.

All the interviews were conducted in private rooms in the participants' schools. Although they were all teachers of English, the interviews were conducted in Mandarin to allow them to express themselves in depth in their mother tongue. The first interviews ranged from 70 minutes to 100 minutes. Each interview was audio recorded. Although concerned that an audio recorder might be obtrusive and might constrain the respondent, it avoided the pressure of taking detailed notes in the process of interviewing and was more reliable than only relying on my memory when analysing the data (Cohen et al., 2011). To minimize the inhibition caused by the recorder, a small recording pen was used and put out of sight after informing the participants of its presence. During the interviews, field notes were taken to capture further evidence and to be compiled and then used later during data analysis (Yin, 2012).

The pre-lesson interviews achieved two purposes. First, they enabled me to become familiar with individual participants and establish trust, so as to make them feel relaxed about being observed later on. Second, it facilitated the exploration of the participant's

espoused beliefs as directly stated or revealed in their reported practice. Focusing on one participant only at a time allowed for listening to the recording and reading the field notes over and over again, which helped deepen my understanding of each participant and raised some queries, which were noted down for observation purposes and the post-observation interviews.

3.4.2 Observations

Observation is a powerful and flexible tool for researchers to seek explicit evidence through their own eyes, being independent of the participants' personal views (Moyles, 2002). The 'implicit assumption behind observation is that behaviour is purposive and expressive of deeper values and beliefs' (Burns, 2000, p. 411). It is a process in which the researcher 'gathers "live" data from naturally occurring social situations' and 'looks directly at what is taking place *in situ'*, which 'has the potential to yield more valid or authentic data' (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 456). In this research study, classroom observations were used to gather first-hand information and experience about teacher practices in the classroom, including

- the physical setting: such as the physical environment and the seating arrangement
- human setting: such as the size and composition of the class
- the interactional setting: such as the interaction and discourse patterns
- the program setting: such as the resources, curricula and their organization (Morrison, 1993, p. 80).

Classroom observation was arranged as early as possible after the first interview, followed by post-lesson conversational interviews after each observation and a stimulated recall interview one or two days after all the observations had been conducted. Five observations of each participant's classroom teaching (45/40 minutes/class) were conducted within a week's span, capturing the key procedures of the teaching of a unit of work. A recorder pen was used to capture the verbal interactions that were taking place in class. To safeguard impartiality, an observational protocol (see Appendix 7) was used throughout the observations, with a primary focus

on class organization, interaction and participation patterns. As shown on the recorder pen, careful timing records were maintained, which made the analysis easier and more accurate. A passive, non-intrusive role was adopted by sitting in a corner at the back of the classroom, fully immersed in note taking. The audio recording and the observation notes were scrutinized repeatedly on the same day or the next day to generate more notes while classroom processes were still fresh in the mind. This helped to formulate questions to be focused on in the follow-up conversational interviews as well as the final stimulated recall interviews.

3.4.3 Post-observation conversational interviews

To discuss critical incidents and teachers' in-classroom decision-making, as well as how the plan was changed and why, informal conversational interviews (Johnson & Christensen, 2012) of about ten minutes were used during non-teaching periods as soon after the class as was practical. The conversational interviews conducted in Mandarin and were guided by an interview protocol (see Appendix 8) and audio recorded, which generated valuable data in providing insights into the beliefs underlying teachers' practices and factors affecting teachers' in-class decision making.

3.4.4 Stimulated recall interview

Stimulated recall interview refers to the data collecting method of 'interviewing individuals while playing audio or audio-visual recordings of their own behaviour in social situations' (Dempsey, 2010, p. 349). This study involved interviewing participants as they listened to some segments of audio-recordings of their own teaching practice. As motivations and rationales that the participants describe retrospectively may not conform to those that they actually held in the moment of the experience, the interview enables the participants to reflect and hear their actual words in process, to re-trace their thought processes, to think critically about their behaviour, and to provide relevant explanations of their behaviours (ibid.).

For each participant, one stimulated recall interview was conducted in Mandarin as soon after the five class observations as practicable, to 'ensure the greatest memory of the activities by informants as possible' (ibid., p. 355). Conducted in private rooms in the participants' schools and ranging from 70 to 100 minutes, the interviews focused on the discussion of critical moments and salient themes identified in the preliminary analysis to gain a richer understanding of the participants' classroom behaviours, factors influencing their in-class decision making and the beliefs and assumptions that led to their practices. The timing point and questions were marked in the Nvivo software (Version 10) immediately after each observation. When conducting the interview, the specific time points with questions were visited in Nvivo 10 on a laptop, making the interview more purposeful and time-efficient. The participants were also informed that they could ask to stop whenever they had queries or comments. Each interview was audio recorded for further analysis.

3.4.5 Documents

Documents, both public and private, are valuable sources of information to help researchers understand central phenomena in qualitative studies (Creswell, 2013). In this research, available documents were collected, namely local and national EFL educational policies and Curriculum Standards, school EFL policies, sample exam papers and students works, textbooks and supporting materials, teaching plans and classroom handouts. These documents were then used to support the analysis of the data.

Informed by Flick's (2009) comment that:

> Researchers' reflections on their actions and observations in the field, their impressions, irritations, feelings, and so on, become data in their own right, forming part of the interpretation (p. 16).

Throughout the whole process of data collection careful field notes were taken and a reflective research diary was kept to record the ongoing thoughts, critical decision making regarding the data collection process, my feelings, emotions and reflections.

These notes and diaries also proved to be valuable data, which also kept the memory of the data collection process alive.

3.4.6 Reflection on the data collection process

The data collection process was an exciting yet highly challenging experience, demanding time, energy and good interpersonal skills. Although the design specified the initial instrumentation and sampling schemes, allowances were made for 'emergent design flexibility' (Patton, 2002, p. 44). The original single-site multiple case studies involving eight participants turned out to be two-site multiple case studies involving only seven participants. The original plan for using audio-video recording devices in the classroom was changed to audio recording only. The process experienced appeared to reflect Denzin and Lincoln's (2008) remark that 'the choices' made for research practices not only 'depended on the research questions' but also 'the contextual factors of what was available' and what could be done in the research sites (p. 5).

Due to the nature of the research design which required the ongoing analysis of the incoming data to inform the next step of the research, as well as the immediate effect of the stimulated recall interview, the data collection process focused on one teacher at a time; the whole process of initial interview—class observation—informal conversational interview—stimulated recall interview with one participant was completed before the commencement of the data collection process with the next participant. This design made data collection more manageable and maximized the possibility that participants could still easily remember what had happened in the class. In addition, the data from each teacher was collected within a span of 10 to 12 days, which enabled following through a full unit of work authentically taking place in class. Furthermore, this design shortened the time needed for each participant to be involved, therefore, making it less demanding for them.

The process of interacting with the teachers and the research sites greatly evoked my emotions and reflections. Although I constantly reminded myself of being objective,

undoubtedly the data generated was co-constructed through the interaction with the participants, mutually influenced by our feelings, emotions, words and behaviours in the setting, which in turn were influenced by various factors such as our backgrounds, experiences, perceptions and world views. These factors, together with the experience and memories of the data collection process continued to influence the subsequent data analysis process and the interpretation of the data.

3.5 Data management and initial analysis

Data collection and initial analysis were simultaneous processes. The data management and analysis process started as the first dataset was gathered, thereby identifying needed trends and key aspects to inform further data collection processes (Creswell, 2013). Hence, the on-going process involved cycles of data collection, management, analysis, and then further collection.

3.5.1 Data organization and storage

The incoming data was organized into computer files. A table of sources (Creswell, 2012) was developed to help organize the material, and data of each case was categorized into an individual folder. The name of each data source included detailed information (e.g. Case 1 Anli-interview notes-2014.10.8) to ensure easy access. Meanwhile, the audio recordings of the interviews and of class observations were organized into Nvivo 10. In addition, a data backup plan was enacted, namely a 'dropbox folder' and a removable hard disk.

3.5.2 Data transcription and translation

- Field notes were organized and transcribed by the researcher.
- Approximately 21 hours (3h x 7 cases) of audio-recordings of interviews were generated and transcribed verbatim by two contractors, verified and edited by the researcher to ensure the authenticity of the recordings. Examples of the transcripts are attached as Appendix 9.
- The audio recordings of classroom observation [30h (5 x 45 min x 7 cases)] were all transcribed by the researcher except for sections when students were listening

to the tape, having dictation, or reading aloud in chorus words or texts. Examples are attached as Appendix 10.

- The above data was selectively translated when quoted in the thesis by the researcher.

3.5.3 Initial data analysis

Although the data analysis process started as the first dataset was gathered, when the data collection process was completed and all the data was organized into files, the huge amount of data generated from the interviews and observations was overwhelming, despite the fact that the research scope was deliberately limited. Hard as it was, using the research questions as a guideline was an effective measure to keep records on track. The massive amount of data was then conceptually separated into three clusters, namely: 1) teacher beliefs, 2) observed teacher practices, and 3) factors influencing practice.

In the attempt to answer the first research questions about teacher beliefs, data generated from the first interviews were organized into Nvivo 10 and then, as a starting point to code the data, six *a priori* categories based on the beliefs section of the interview protocol (see Appendix 6) were used, namely:

- Lesson planning
- Textbooks and resources
- Assessment
- Environment/ atmosphere/ interpersonal relationship
- Learning responsibilities and power relationship
- How students develop and learn
- Goals of English education

After coding with Nvivo, the first interview data from the first case was coded by hand and read several times. Each time an analysis was conducted a deeper understanding was developed (Creswell, 2013). In conjunction with a further review of literature and constant reflection, the categories were then adjusted and modified, resulting in the following five overarching categories of belief to focus on:

- Beliefs about goals of English education

- Beliefs about learners, teacher and learner-teacher relationships
- Beliefs about learning and teaching
- Beliefs about content, textbooks and resources
- Beliefs about assessment

In the meantime, the need to develop a framework of learner-centredness seemed inevitable, in order to answer the question about the alignment of teachers' beliefs and practices with learner-centredness. The development of the framework is explained in the next section.

3.6 Development of a framework of learner-centredness

The development of a framework of learner-centredness was for the purposes of in-depth data analysis and was informed by the emerging themes of teacher beliefs in this study as well as the dimensions of the second/foreign language (L2) classroom conceptualized in Section 2.2 (see Table 3.3).

Table 3.3 Categories of teacher beliefs and practices

Teacher beliefs about	Teacher practices regarding
Aims of L2 education	Classroom environment and climate
Learners, teacher and L – T relationships	Activities and tasks
Learning and teaching	Interaction and discourse
	Learning strategies and learner thinking
Assessment	Assessment
Content and resources	Content and resources

These categories were used as organizing themes to analyze and synthesize learner-centred beliefs and practices as established in the academic literature. This effort led to the generation of a framework of learner-centred teacher practices and beliefs, which served as a frame of reference for this study, guiding the analysis and interpretation of the data. The details of the framework are presented in Tables 3.4a and 3.4b.

Table 3.4a Categories and indicators of learner-centred teacher beliefs

1. Beliefs about aims of (EFL) education

- Develop learners' learning and thinking skills, including critical and creative thinking
- Facilitate learners' development as a person, both cognitively and affectively
- Develop learners' creativity, flexibility and adaptability to be life-long learners and social beings
- Develop learners' language proficiency and competence, including communicative and intercultural competence
- Facilitate learners to achieve their short term and long term aims, including passing high stakes examinations.

2. Beliefs about learners, teachers and L–T relationships

The learner:

- All people are natural learners with unique/different preferences, characteristics, learning styles and capacities, due to different prior learning experiences, heredity, linguistic and socio-cultural backgrounds
- Learners are capable of and will be empowered by taking responsibilities and sharing decision making
- Learners should be the ones to do the learning, by means of active participation in the learning process

The teacher:

- Teachers are normal people who will also make mistakes
- Teachers are not authority figures, but equal to learners

L–T relationships:

- Teachers and learners are partners and co-creators of the learning experience
- Teachers are facilitators rather than knowledge transmitters
- The attitudinal qualities which exist in the personal relationship between the teacher and the learner is a key factor influencing learning

3. Beliefs about learning and teaching

Classroom environment and climate:

- Learning is facilitated in a safe environment where learners have a sense of belonging, minimal external criticism and perceived threat to learners' self-image, and learners have cooperative and supportive attitudes
- Learning is facilitated when there is a balanced freedom and responsibility, self-directed and teacher-directed learning, a right amount of challenge and the opportunity to experience success
- Significant learning is facilitated by attitudinal qualities existing in the personal relationship between the facilitator and learner, such as realness, trust, empathy, warmth, valuing feelings, opinions and the person
- Learning is more effective when:
  - teachers accept learners as they are, catering for learners' individual

differences and needs
- teachers have high expectations and positive regard for learners
- teachers respect learner differences, value their perspectives, promote self-esteem and self-efficacy

The learning process:

- Learning is more effective:
  - when it is goal-oriented, linking to learners' prior learning and experience
  - when learners are intrinsically motivated, as when learning is of personal relevance and interesting
  - through experiencing, discovery, problem solving
  - when learners are engaged in active meaning-making and knowledge construction
  - when learning is self-initiated and involves all the senses of the learner (cognitively, emotionally, physically)
- Learning is facilitated by meaningful social and peer interaction and scaffolding
- Self-criticism and self-evaluation facilitate learner independence, creativity and self-reliance

4. Beliefs about assessment

- Use formative evaluation experiences to promote learning by focusing on learning processes
- Monitor progress continually to provide feedback on individual growth
- Incorporate self-assessment and peer assessment
- Include learner input in design and revision
- Allow diversity of competencies to be demonstrated in a variety of ways
- Provide opportunities for learner choice of types of products to demonstrate achievement of educational standards
- Assess different learners differently
- Support learners in the preparation for assessment, reducing stress and anxiety of evaluation experiences

5. Belief about content and resources

- Content should have a dual function as a body of knowledge and as a media to develop learning skills
- Textbooks and resources should be adapted to be developmentally appropriate, meaningful and relevant
- A wide variety of input and resources should be used to enrich and facilitate learning

Table 3.4b Categories and indicators of learner-centred teacher practices

1. Classroom environment and climate

The teacher:

- Is a real person with empathy, enthusiasm, trust and acceptance of learners
- Has and conveys high expectations for all learners
- Has positive attitudes towards learners
- Values creativity, different voices and styles
- Caters for individual difference and needs

Establishing classroom norms:

- Cultivate respect, helpfulness, supportiveness, and cooperativeness among learners
- Foster a sense of inclusion and belonging
- Minimize criticism and threat by setting up clear classroom rules, expectations and routines
- Involve learners in decision making and managing the class
- Cultivate in learners a sense of responsibility for the learning process and outcomes
- Facilitate a sense of self-efficacy, self-esteem, and empowerment
- Cultivate in learners a capacity for self-discipline

Physical features:

- Welcoming and bright
- Easy access and rich resources
- Display of learners' work

2. Activities and tasks

- Include complex, interactive, first-hand learning experiences
- Use activities or tasks of appropriate challenge
- Use activities or tasks that are relevant to learners and stimulate learners varied interests
- Include activities that encourage learners to work collaboratively with other learners
- Include peer learning and peer teaching as part of the instructional method
- Provide multiple opportunities for learners to discover and process information based on their preferred learning styles
- Provide tasks that stimulate learners' thinking beyond rote memorizing
- Activate learners' different senses in the process of learning
- Give opportunity for learners to demonstrate the command of or apply new knowledge
- Vary activities as appropriate to the content of learning, catering for learner difference

3. Classroom interaction and discourse

- Provide structure without being overly directive
- Make sure learners know the agenda, purpose, and plan
- Communicate clearly and effectively

- Activate learners' retrieval with and linking of prior learning and experience
- Make learning relevant and interesting to learners
- Provide appropriate amount of explanation
- Engage learners in active process of knowledge and information

Questioning and turn allocation:

- Use different kinds of questions to create supportive conditions for comprehension, practicing, participation and higher-order thinking
- Assist learners during difficulties with complex classroom tasks
- Help them maintain focus on the task
- Guide them in producing their own contributions to the interaction
- Ask probing questions to engage higher-order thinking
- Vary turn allocation patterns to ensure fairness and maximize participation

Feedback and error correction:

- Provide timely, specific, and constructive feedback
- Allow time and space for self and peer error-correction
- Allow adequate time for reflection, contemplation, and expansion to process new information
- Allow time for enough practice for internalization of knowledge

4. Learning strategies and learner thinking

Learning strategies:

- Facilitate personal and meaningful goal setting
- Demonstrate strategies and facilitate use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies
- Share and discuss learning strategies with learners
- Facilitate learners' self-cognition
- Promote reflection on the product and process of learning

Learner thinking:

- Help learners refine their understanding by using critical thinking skills
- Encourage learners to think for themselves
- Use activities and tasks that engage learners in higher-order thinking
- Ask questions that evoke thinking and discussion
- Use Bloom's taxonomy as a reference for task design, questioning and assessment

5. Assessment

- Allow diversity of competencies to be demonstrated in a variety of ways
- Monitor progress continually to provide feedback on individual growth and progress
- Include learner input in design and revision
- Provide appropriate opportunities for learner choice of types of products for demonstrating achievement of educational standards
- Support learners in the preparation for assessment
- Include self-assessment and peer assessment

6. Content and resources

- Adapt content and resources to be meaningful, relevant and developmentally appropriate
- Use content for a dual function as a body of knowledge and as media to develop learning skills
- Use a wide variety of resources and input to cater for learner differences and needs

Sources: Bailey, 2004; Biggs, 1999; Brown, 2004, 2014; Brown & Armstrong, 1984; Cohen, 1998, 2011; Gibbs, 1992; Hall 1997, 2002; Hall & Verplaetse, 2000; Kaufeldt, 2010; Kumaravadivelu, 1994; 2006; McCombs, 2013; McCombs & Whisler, 1997; McInerney & McInerney, 2010; Nunan, 1988, 1999, 2001, 2004; Rogers, 1969, 1983; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994; Tsui, 1995; Tudor, 1996; Weimer 2002, 2012; Wenden, 2002; Williams & Burdon, 1997; Woolfolk & Margetts, 2013.

These indicators of learner-centred beliefs and practices are by no means exhaustive. However, they do provide a comprehensive representation of what is meant by learner-centredness as established in the academic literature. Some of the indicators of different categories are overlapping as many aspects of teacher beliefs influence the other aspects and are interrelated to one another, as are the different dimensions of teacher practices. It is impossible to identify all the indicators in one classroom, as commented by McCombs and Whisler (1997). Rather, learner-centredness is a relative issue depending on the degree that a teacher's beliefs and practices are aligned with these indicators.

Accordingly, for this study, matrices for the mapping of teacher beliefs and practices against the framework of learner-centredness were developed to aid the analysis (see Tables 3.5a & 3.5b). The matrices comprise categories of beliefs/practices and four degrees of alignment with learner-centredness: *Hardly, A little, Some extent, Great extent*. The mapping depends on the alignment of the teacher's beliefs and/or practices with the indicators of learner-centredness in the framework (Tables 3.4a & 3.4b). For example, regarding beliefs about aims of L2 teaching, if a teacher only embraces the aim of preparing learners for exams, then she is mapped as 'Hardly' aligning with learner-centredness, whereas a teacher is mapped as 'Great extent' if she embraces the aims of preparing learners for exams, developing learners' linguistic and

communicative ability, and developing learners learning, thinking and overall ability.

Table 3.5a Mapping alignment of teacher beliefs with learner-centredness

Categories of Beliefs	**Extent to which teacher beliefs align with Learner-centredness**			
	Hardly	A little	Some extent	Great extent
Aims of L2 teaching	e.g. • mainly for preparing learners for exams			e.g. • preparing learners for exams • developing learners linguistic and communicative competence • developing learners' learning, thinking and overall ability
Learners, teacher & L–T relationship				
Learning & teaching				
Content & resources				
Assessment				

Table 3.5b Mapping alignment of teacher practices with learner-centredness

Categories of Practices	**Extent to which teacher practices align with Learner-Centredness**			
	Hardly	A little	Some extent	Great extent
Learning environment & classroom climate				
Learning tasks & activities				
Classroom interaction & discourse				
Learner thinking & learning strategies				
Content & resources				
Assessment				

3.7 Data analysis

The initial analysis of the data prompted the development of the framework of learner-centredness, which is used at two levels. First, the categories of beliefs and practices were respectively used as the organizing themes to analyze the pre-lesson interview data (beliefs) and the class observation data (practices). Based on these themes, further thematic analysis was carried out, which is detailed in the following subsections.

3.7.1 Pre-lesson interview data

Using the five categories of beliefs as a tool, one teacher's interview data was examined, coded first with Nvivo 10 and then by hand a few times, while any comments, thoughts, concerns were marked down, noting down the emerging themes within each category of beliefs. Along with the emerging themes, the factors influencing teacher beliefs were also coded. This process was applied to the other six teachers' interview data, while common patterns and themes were identified, and variations or comparisons across all the participants were noted. Data for each case was scrutinized and analyzed individually before all the cases were compared and contrasted horizontally, section by section. In the end, 23 themes about teacher beliefs emerged, which are reported in the first data chapter (Chapter 4), with each teacher's beliefs mapped against the framework of learner-centredness and then synthesized towards the end of the chapter. All the pre-observation interview data was analyzed before the systematic analysis of the classroom observation and post-lesson data, which is now explained.

3.7.2 Class observation and post-lesson interview data

Regarding the class observation data, the audio-recordings were listened to repeatedly, transcribed and analyzed. Thematic analysis was used, with comments and notes made in the Nvivo document along with the transcripts. The data was then coded into the six big categories of L2 classroom teaching, and then read and coded by hand. I managed to recall and make sense of the classroom teaching with these data sources, with the

support of the observation notes and my reflective diary kept on the same days as the observations. The classroom observation data and the post-lesson interview data (conversational interview and stimulated recall interview) were analyzed side by side. Based on the six categories of teacher practices, further subthemes and patterns were identified, leading to 24 subthemes comprising 80 nodes. Next, the findings about teacher beliefs and about teacher practices were synthesized and compared to identify discrepancies between teacher beliefs and practices. Finally, factors influencing teacher practices were coded and analyzed, leading to 13 nodes grouped into four themes.

Detailed analysis of the huge amount of complex data is reported in four chapters, with teachers' practices repeatedly mapped against the framework of learner-centredness. Chapter 5 focuses on classroom activities and tasks. Chapter 6 focuses on classroom interaction and discourse. Chapter 7 attends to four categories of teacher practices: assessment, content and resources, learner thinking and learning strategies; and classroom learning environment and climate. It also reports discrepancies between teacher beliefs and practices. The findings n factors influencing teacher practices were then reported in Chapter 8.

The data analysis process was most challenging and time consuming. It involved constant thinking, reflection, doubting, and even frustration. This process was never a linear one, requiring constant moving back and forth to read and make meaning out of the data, diagnosing emerging themes and testing out hypotheses. There were moments when I found myself lost and stuck, I constantly turned to literature and my supervisors for guidance, and referred back to the research questions to regain focus. The framework of learner-centredness functioned in two ways. First, it provided the broad *a prior* categories for the analysis, although the analysis was data driven rather than framework driven, as any emerging themes and patterns were captured and reported. Second, the framework and the associated matrices made the mapping of teacher beliefs and practices easier and theoretically well-grounded.

3.8 Ethical considerations

During the research, I was guided by the principles of respecting and protecting my research participants, 'promoting the integrity of research', and 'guarding against misconduct and impropriety' (Creswell, 2008, p. 87). I employed the following strategies to ensure ethical conduct throughout the research process.

- Gaining access properly through the authorities of the school (the principals)
- Providing the school authority and the participants with an information letter, introducing the nature, purpose and span of the research, identifying level of involvement and ways of participating (see Appendices 7 & 8)
- Respecting the research sites and the participants; minimizing disruption so as to leave the research sites and the participants undisturbed after the research study
- Recruiting voluntary participants and obtaining signed informed consent forms (see Appendix 5) from the participants, assuring them of the right to withdraw from the research project anytime
- Protecting the privacy and any intimate information from being disclosed and conveying this protection to all the participants
- Guaranteeing confidentiality to the participants
- Creating pseudonyms for the school and participants in data analysis and reporting
- Keeping all the information and the data for five years at the University of South Australia on completion of the research project.

3.9 Trustworthiness of the study

Assuming different ontological, epistemological and methodological procedures, different paradigms use different criteria for evaluating the trustworthiness of research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 33). The conventional criteria of rigour from the positivist perspective, namely internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity defined, proved to be inappropriate for judging research studies conducted from a naturalistic perspective (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 293-301). To address this issue, Lincoln and Guba made the effort to devise 'criteria of trustworthiness' including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as parallel criteria appropriate to the naturalistic paradigm (Schwandt, Lincoln & Guba, 2007, p. 18). They also suggested a

range of techniques to ensure the trustworthiness of research, for example, prolonged engagement in the field, persistent observation, triangulation, rich description, audit trails of evidence, member checking, respondent validation, and reflexivity.

Guided by Lincoln and Guba's advice, I have taken the following steps to enhance the trustworthiness of this study. First, I have provided a clear, detailed and in-depth description of the participants, the context and the data collection and analysis process for others to decide whether the findings are transferable to another situation (Cohen et al., 2011). Second, as an instrument of data collection, I recognise that my cultural and personal perspectives are bound to affect how the data is collected, interpreted and reported (Yin, 2009). Therefore I have provided detailed information about my own background, experiences, and the framework that I espouse, as well as my role in the research, to address explicitly the issue of my value judgments, bias and subjectivity. Third, a reflexive research diary was kept throughout this study to note down critical moments, decision making and associated reasons. Fourth, throughout this research, I have constantly referred to theories and research in this field to make informed decisions. Fifth, I have used external debriefing with supervisors and consultations with other scholars to ensure clear explanation and informed decision making.

3.10 Chapter summary

In summary, this chapter has provided a detailed explanation and rationale for the research methodology and the qualitative multiple-case study design to explore teachers' beliefs and practices. Through purposeful selection, seven participants from two schools were selected. Data collection tools included pre-observation interviews, class observation and post-observation conversations and stimulated recall interviews, document collection, field notes and research diaries. A framework of learner-centredness and associated matrices were developed based on literature and the emerging themes of the data to guide the analysis of this study. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data, which was a cyclical process involving constant reflection,

hypothesising, doubting, confirming and careful note taking and documenting. The research design allowed flexibility, as did the data analysis process. The themes and nodes were constantly adjusted throughout the data analysis and reporting process. This challenging process could not have been managed without the theoretically well-grounded framework of learner-centredness, constant referencing back to the research aims and questions, and consultation with supervisors, scholars and relevant literature. The next chapter (Chapter 4) will report the findings regarding teacher beliefs and factors that influenced their beliefs.

Chapter 4 Teachers' educational beliefs and factors influencing their beliefs

This first data chapter aims to answer the first set of research questions: What are teachers' educational beliefs? How do teachers' beliefs align with learner-centredness? What factors influence teachers' beliefs? The data was generated from the individual pre-observation interview with each of the seven participants. A wide range of educational beliefs were identified, some shared by all seven teachers, while others embraced only by one of them. A belief may have been fully supported by some teachers while only partly supported by others. Various factors influencing these beliefs are identified, including parents' influence, experience as an English learner and user, pre-service training and in-service mentoring, and constant reflection on their own and others' practice. Even when sharing the same belief(s), teachers may have different reasons influenced by their unique background.

This chapter starts with a profile of each participant (Section 4.1). Then it reports the findings about teachers' beliefs categorised into five themes emergent from the data. These are beliefs about: aims of English as a foreign language (L2) teaching (Section 4.2); beliefs about learners, the teacher and the learner-teacher (L–T) relationship (Section 4.3); beliefs about teaching and learning (Section 4.4); beliefs about content and resources (Section 4.5); and beliefs about assessment (Section 4.6). Factors influencing these beliefs are identified. The beliefs in each category are then mapped against the framework of learner-centredness at the end of each section. The chapter ends with a discussion of the overall findings in this chapter (Section 4.7).

4.1 Participant profiles

This section provides a brief profile of each participant. The seven participants had different career motivations, for example, teaching is a dream job for one, while only an accidental career for another. When asked about what factors influenced their

education-related beliefs and practices, some recalled their parents' influence and experience as a student, while others emphasized their professional development (PD) experience. For a summary of the demographic information of the participants, see Table 3.1.

All seven teachers are qualified secondary teachers. All of them are female aged from late twenties to early fifties, with a teaching experience ranging from 7 to 33 years. Their unique characteristics, personal histories and experiences made them who they were as English teachers, thus influencing their educational beliefs. In referring to them here pseudonyms are used, and in the tables just the first letter of the pseudonym is given.

4.1.1 Anli Zhen

Anli Zhen is in her late 30s and has been teaching English for 14 years in Xinhua Middle School since her graduation from university with a Bachelor of Arts degree in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages). She was born into a family of teachers and grew up at the 'desk' of her father, a teacher admired and liked by students. In middle school, Anli was a class monitor and was given a great deal of responsibility by the class teacher and the school principal to manage the class. Her father, her maths teacher in middle school, once let her teach a math lesson to her classmates on her own, an experience having a profound influence on her. Her family background, together with her experience as a student in middle school, made her embrace only one dream: to become a teacher. Teaching was her only application choice to universities and she ended up doing a four year degree in TESOL and became a junior secondary English teacher. On her first day of teaching, her father gave her a piece of advice: to write a reflection after each lesson. With this advice, Anli started her dream career. At the time of this study, she was teaching two Year 7 classes.

4.1.2 Bailin Huang

Bailin Huang is in her early 30s and has been teaching English for 11 years in Xihua

Middle School ever since graduating from university with a Bachelor of Arts degree in TESOL. When she was young, her father always told her that it does not matter how clever one is, what counts more is to be down-to-earth and do things earnestly, and that one should try one's best to do things that one can manage to do. Therefore, she thinks she was brought up to be quite independent. She thinks that she was a bit introverted when she was in middle school, although she studied well and obtained high grades in exams. She considers her personality a 'stumbling block, hindering many possibilities'. She wished that 'the development of students' ability and personality had been paid more attention to' so that she could have been more outgoing, confident and competent. At the time of this research, she was teaching two Year 7 classes, being class teacher of the class observed.

4.1.3 Chen Shi

Chen Shi, in her mid-30s, graduated from university with a Bachelor of Art in Tourism Management. Upon graduation 13 years ago, teaching positions were available, so she passed the examination to enter teaching and started teaching Chinese in a rural middle school. One year later she obtained the teacher's certificate qualifying her as an English teacher. In the following year she started teaching English. Her job involved not only teaching English but also teacher management. Ever since she was a student, she has had the belief that 'the responsibility of learning does not only lie with the teacher, but also with the students themselves'. Therefore, 'the students need to find ways in which they can learn better and quicker'. She described herself as someone who 'likes to observe, watch, listen, reflect', 'learn from others' and then 'make the learning her own'. By the time of the research, she had been at Xihua Middle School for just one month and was teaching English to a Year 9 Class and a Year 7 Class, being class teacher of the observed Year 7 class.

4.1.4 Dongmei Zhang

Dongmei Zhang, in her late 30s, has been teaching English for 14 years since her

graduation from university with a Bachelor degree in English Literature. She obtained the teacher's certificate afterwards. Before she moved to Xihua Secondary School seven years ago, she was teaching Senior High School English. When she was a high school student, she enjoyed her English classes because of her English teacher, whose classes were always well-organized, well-structured and clearly presented. In university, she met a teacher who was very humorous, witty and knowledgeable so that everyone in the class liked him and felt interested in his classes. At the time of the research, Dongmei was teaching two Year 8 classes, being class teacher of the observed class.

4.1.5 Enya Han

Enya Han, the youngest of the seven participants, in her late 20s, graduated from University with a Bachelor of Arts degree in TESOL. After graduation, she applied for many other positions but ended up as an English teacher. When she was a student in middle school, the students were streamed into different classes on a yearly basis. So each year she had different classmates and/or teachers. When she went to deal with enrolment with her parents at the beginning of Year 9, a teacher who taught her in Year 7 and was to teach her again in Year 9 spoke highly of her to the teacher of Politics in front of her parents, recommending her as the class subject representative to the Politics teacher. She was so surprised because she perceived herself not learning English well in Year 7 and did not expect that this teacher could even remember her. She was so touched that she began studying English hard and therefore learned well. By the time of the research, she had been teaching English in Xihua Secondary School for 7 years and was teaching two Year 7 classes, being class teacher of the observed class.

4.1.6 Fang Yang

Fang Yang is the second oldest teacher (in her mid-40s), holding a Bachelor of Arts degree in English Literature. She has been teaching English for 26 years, the last 18 years being in Yizhi Secondary School. She has such a strong sense of responsibility that even when her house was on fire and everything was destroyed, she still went to

school and attended the class meeting with the students, feeling that she could not leave the students unattended. She feels that her university study and the in-service PD programs have had a strong influence on her teaching practice. However, her views varied regarding different in-service PD programs, some of which were useful and relevant to her, some not and thus she would not apply much to her own teaching. At the time of the research she was teaching two Year 8 classes, being the Group Leader of Year 8 English Teaching and Research Group.

4.1.7 Guiyun Zhang

Guiyun Zhang, in her early 50s, is the oldest of the seven participants in terms of both age and teaching history. She has been teaching English for 33 years and started her teaching career after obtaining a secondary technology school diploma majoring in English education, which she thinks did not equip her with necessary teaching skills or knowledge. She was not clear about the field of educational psychology and pedagogy. A few days after she started the practicum, her mentors asked her to teach the class independently and that was how, with limited knowledge and practical skills, she started her teaching career. Afterwards, she obtained an Associate Bachelor degree through taking self-study programs and a Bachelor degree by taking a correspondence program. In her mind, ‘teaching is a profession to do with conscience’ and ‘no matter what career one has taken up, one should, for one thing, spare no pains to do it well, for another, constantly improve oneself’. Trying her best to make a change, however small it may be, made her feel peaceful and happy. At the time of the research, she was teaching two Year 9 classes and was about to retire in two years’ time.

4.2 Beliefs about aims of L2 teaching

This section presents the aims of L2 education espoused by the seven teachers. Three aims were identified (see Table 4.1). The dominant aim was to prepare students for exams, followed by developing students’ ability to speak and use English. Only three

teachers embraced the aim of facilitating the overall development of students, including learning and thinking ability.

Table 4.1 Teacher beliefs about aims of teaching English

Beliefs about aims of teaching English	Anli	Bailin	Chen	Dongmei	Enya	Fang	Guiyun
• Preparing students for exams	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y
• Developing students' ability to speak and use English	Y	Y	Y		Y-		Y
• Facilitating student's learning, thinking ability and overall development	Y	Y	Y-				

Legend: Y = a belief held or partly held (Y-) by the participant

Each of these aims as interpreted by the participants is explained in detail in the following sub-sections.

4.2.1 Preparing students for exams

Preparing students for exams was an aim embraced by all seven teachers except Chen. Chen's belief as shown in the profile (see Section 4.1.3) and her response to the question regarding the aims of L2 teaching shows why she disregarded "teaching toward tests":

> The aim is to teach students how to study so that they can eventually be able to study English by themselves, regardless of which year level it is (Chen).

By contrast, exams seemed to be the only aim of teaching for Dongmei and Fang:

> To be honest, I think the purpose of learning English is for exams, because students need to do well in exams to enter a good high school (Dongmei).
>
> The exam system is here; you will have to take the exams (Fang).

Fang also reported that her teaching focused more on what was likely to appear in exams, which she required students to recite, saying that:

> They must be able to recite, and to be able to recite, you will have to ask them to read (aloud) … Whatever you want them to be able to recite you will have to ask them to read it aloud (Fang).

Therefore, the perceived importance of exams contributed to Fang's promoting rote learning and so, to her, learning English means to read aloud and recite the language, in order to do well in exams.

The other four teachers were between the two extremes. Enya espoused this aim 'beyond doubt', while Guiyun felt that even though this aim was necessary, it was to some degree contradictory to her other aim of developing students' ability to speak and use English. She 'had no choice but to teach mainly according to the exams', and thus focused more on written exercises and grammar rules in her teaching. Guiyun's words reveal a tension between what she believed and what she actually did.

Anli and Bailin took a critical position regarding this aim. Anli believed it was not worthwhile if passing exams was the only purpose:

> I always ask myself what is the purpose of learning English. To pass exams, as is often said? I think it is not worth it (Anli).

Similar to Anli, Bailin 'do(es) not share the aim of preparing students for exams only', thinking that 'passing the exam is a process only, which is meaningless afterwards' and:

> If teachers only prepare students for exams, they would only care for grades and let students do rote-learning, which will make it harder for students to survive high school later on (Bailin).

Bailin's words indicate the possible drawbacks of teaching mainly for exam purposes, which include over-emphasizing rote learning and ignoring students' overall progress and other needs.

In summary, some teachers perceived the exam influence as central to their teaching, while others questioned teaching in this way. Fang and Dongmei embraced it as the only aim and Enya accepted it as a primary aim without doubt, while Chen disregarded it altogether as an aim for teaching English. Anli and Bailin accepted it critically,

accommodating it with other aims, whereas Guiyun found ‘exams’ contradictory to her other aims.

4.2.2 Developing students’ ability to speak and use English

The second most prevalently espoused aim is to develop students’ ability to speak and use English, which is highly related to teachers’ beliefs regarding the function and status of English as a language, and/or how it is better learnt. For example, Anli embraced this aim due to her beliefs about the function of English as a language and her understanding of how a language is best learnt, thinking that:

> English is a language, so students should listen more and speak more … The pragmatic function (of English) should be the focus … what is learnt should be used, regardless whether listening, speaking or writing (Anli).

To her, ‘language learnt without practicing is more easily forgotten’. This remark was made based on her reflections on the phenomenon that:

> Many people who had learnt English in the past but have forgotten most of it because they do not use it (Anli).

She reflected on her experience as a language learner in which grammar knowledge was the main focus of teaching. Despite having a good command of grammar knowledge, she used to be not sufficiently confident to communicate with English native speakers.

Bailin explained the perceived advantage or status of English. She hoped that ‘students can use English in real life as it has become inevitable to use English (in everyday life)’, believing that:

> It will be a great advantage if students can make a living on English even when English is used in everyday life (Bailin).

Similarly, Enya commented that:

> A good grasp of English or the ability to use English is important, which can definitely guarantee a more promising future for one’s profession or life (Enya).

Enya was influenced by her experiences in job interviews upon graduation from

university. She met interviewers who were non-English majors but could speak English very well, better than she could as an English major. She was then quite discouraged yet convinced of the saying that 'English is a tool'. Enya was aware of the need for English in present day China as many positions require employees to communicate in English. This said, of the two aims she embraced, Enya still prioritised the first aim of preparing students for exams.

By contrast, Guiyun prioritised the aim of developing students' ability to speak and use English, due to her view on the sequential order of language acquisition, considering it:

> A real suffering if students have to do the written exams without having formed the habit of listening and speaking … having to rote-learn without time for plenty of practice in listening and speaking (Guiyun).

Her belief was further reinforced by the new textbooks, which she found 'up-to-date and practical, aiming to develop students' ability to speak and use English'. She wished to 'experience the way of teaching advocated by the textbook', so in recent years, she 'tried to incorporate more listening and speaking activities'. Her experience taught her that language learning was more effective if teachers facilitate students' ability to use the language rather than only to rote learn the words and grammar, and 'it can lead to better exam results'. This view resembled Anli's, who believed that 'listening and speaking should not conflict with [students'] ability to do written exams', and experience has told her that 'a balanced and integrated approach is desirable'.

Chen did not see English as a 'real language' for communication but 'a tool' in China. However, she aimed to 'enable students to open their mouths to speak English, eliminating their fear and building up their confidence'. She had this aim because she believed it could make students feel more interested in learning the language.

In summary, the five participants considered the aim of students' speaking and using English as important. The reasons were: perception of the function and status of English in China (Anli, Bailin, Enya), effective learning and retaining of English as a foreign language (Anli, Chen, Guiyun), observation of the common phenomenon of English

learners in China (Anli), experience as an English learner and user (Anli, Enya), as well as the influence of textbooks (Guiyun). Both Dongmei and Fang, however, did not discuss this as an aim.

4.2.3 Facilitating student's learning, thinking ability and overall development

Three teachers (Anli, Bailin, Chen) embraced the aim of facilitating students' learning, thinking ability and overall development. Anli reported that she deliberately used learning strategies and ways of thinking to 'demonstrate', 'share' and 'ask students to share' learning strategies and ways of thinking, and that she facilitated learners' self-reflection on 'where the problem lay' and on the effectiveness of their ways of learning. She also aimed to facilitate the overall development of each student as a person, which she considered the ultimate goal of education, believing that 'in the long run, I am teaching students how to be a person rather than teaching English only'.

Likewise, Bailin regarded 'ability' as the most important of all, including learning, thinking ability and the ability to live in the world. She believed that it would be hard for students to survive in high school and in the society if teachers did not pay attention to students' overall ability development but only taught them to do rote-learning for exam purposes. Therefore, she aimed to facilitate the overall development of the students, including their personality, confidence, habits, ability to communicate and deal with others, and ability and tolerance to face social competition and difficulties. She seemed to regard as particularly important the overall ability of a person to act with agency, saying that:

> Many people are not satisfied with the current situation in China. If you have the ability, you can have two choices, to go abroad or to become more capable and change the situation (Bailin).

Various factors accounted for Bailin's emphasis on 'ability', including: her own schooling experience, her perception about the needs of students in the future world, and her reflection on one of her student's experiences. First, when she was a middle school student, 'the school did not pay attention to the development of students' ability

and personality'. Even though she studied well and achieved good grades in exams, she was then 'a bit introverted', which she considered 'a stumbling block, hindering many possibilities'. She wished that she could have been more outgoing, confident and competent. Second, she believed that 'the competition in society nowadays requires teachers to change their perspectives' and it is not enough to develop students who achieve good grades and 'appear to be well-behaved, not disturbing others or making trouble'. Such an understanding was influenced by a student she once taught. The student always studied well and behaved well, but he was very introverted. He ended up with depression and did not finish high school. Later on something even worse happened to him, the detail of which Bailin felt she should not tell.

Chen believed that the aim of teaching English is to teach students how to study, developing their ability to eventually study English by themselves and to think independently. To her, 'students need to find ways in which they can learn better and quicker', so she 'shared with students such ways that she found effective when she was a student'. In addition, she believed that teachers should care more about students themselves, encouraging them to have their own thoughts and to think independently. Chen's belief was influenced by her own learning experience at school and her concern about students' future learning, who explained that:

> If teachers are the ones to think and manage students, students' self-discipline will not be developed, and they will follow the teacher's will and only do as is told by the teacher (Chen).

In summary, Anli, Bailin and Chen embraced the aim of developing students' learning and thinking ability. Anli and Bailin expressed the broad view of facilitating overall development and empowering students to be better learners, better people (Anli) and capable agents for social change (Bailin). Factors influencing this aim included their understanding of the ultimate goal of education (Anli) and students' future learning and needs (Bailin, Chen), and reflection on their own experience as a student and a student's experience (Bailin).

4.2.4 Summary and discussion

The seven teachers' beliefs about aims of teaching varied, despite working in similar contexts. Some regarded 'exams' as the only aim for teaching and learning while others also take into consideration learners' long-term goals. The degree to which their beliefs are aligned with learner-centredness is mapped out in Table 4.2. The mapping is for illustrative purposes only, as it is not based on statistics. It visualizes the relative position of each teacher in relation to one another within a continuum of learner-centred education, namely to facilitate the overall development of learners, including their cognitive, metacognitive and affective development, and to develop learners' thinking and learning ability and adaptability to be self-regulated life-long learners and social beings, and finally to develop students' overall language proficiency and competence, intercultural awareness and communicative competence (see Section 3.6).

Table 4.2 Alignment of beliefs with learner-centredness – Aims of L2 teaching

Category of Teacher Beliefs	**Alignment with Learner-centredness**			
	Hardly	A little	Some extent	Great extent
Aims of L2 teaching	D F	E	C G	A B

Legend: A – Anli; B – Bailin; C – Chen; D – Dongmei; E – Enya; F – Fang; G – Guiyun

Dongmei's and Fang's beliefs hardly aligned with learner-centred beliefs. They only focused on one component of the learner: the immediate instrumental needs of the learners to pass exams. Enya's beliefs were to a little degree learner-centred as she valued 'the ability to speak and use English' even while prioritizing 'exams'. Chen's and Guiyun's beliefs were to some degree learner-centred as Guiyun prioritized the ability to speak and use English to exams, while Chen embraced two aims other than exams. Anli's and Bailin's beliefs about the aims of L2 teaching aligned, to a great extent, with learner-centred beliefs. Taking a critical stance about exams, they accommodated different aims in their teaching. Both aimed to attend to learners' immediate instrumental needs of passing exams and also their broader and longer-term

needs, such as their ability to speak and use English, and ability to learn, think and survive in future society.

Various factors were identified as influencing teachers' beliefs about the aims of L2 education, including teachers':

- perception of the importance of exams for students
- perception of the function and status of English in China and the world
- understanding of effective learning and retaining of English as a foreign language
- observation of the common phenomenon of English learners in China
- reflection on their own experience as an English learner and user and as a student in general
- consideration about students' future needs
- influence of textbooks.

The above factors not only confirm the perceived status of English in China as stated in Section 1.1, it also pinpoints the important role of exams for students. Embracing 'exams' as the only aim, as two of the seven teachers did, may limit teachers' practices by focusing mainly on what is likely to be tested in the exams. Such practice seemed to promote rote-learning as pointed out by Bailin and reported by Fang, which fits exactly in what Liu and Wu (2006) observed as common practice of teaching to the exam. Nevertheless, although working in similar school contexts, the other teachers have different perceptions about and responses to the contextual factors, thus embracing different aims about L2 teaching. These differences are in a way influenced by their knowledge about effective language learning. For example, Anli's believed in making use of the language to better retain it while Fang regarded reading aloud as effective way to recite the words and sentences.

Furthermore, teachers' critical reflectiveness on their own learning and teaching experience and on how their own practice projects the students for the future also makes a difference. For example, Anli's beliefs about effective learning of English was influenced by her critical reflection on her own experience as a language learner and user and on the common phenomenon of English learners in China. Similarly,

questioning the traditional ways of teaching in so far as preparing students for future life, Bailin asserted that teachers should change their perspectives and focus on not only the grades, but also the overall ability of a person, which she regarded as an agent to bring about social change.

The data reveal a dilemma that faced Guiyun. The exam influence seemed so overwhelming to her that she could not accommodate the other aim of developing students' ability to use English, which she internally prioritized. As a result, her reported practices were mainly grammar-translation based, which caused her anguish. However, her personal and professional values of trying her best to make a change to have a clear conscience, as shown in the profile (see Section 4.1.7), urged her to explore alternative ways of teaching. Her initial experience in this effort had assured her that facilitating students' ability to use the language could lead to better exam results. This view was also held by Anli. The findings point to the need of the opportunity for teachers to be exposed to educational theories and practices about effective L2 teaching and learning, as well as the opportunity for teachers to communicate and exchange their educational experience and opinions.

This section has analyzed teachers' beliefs regarding the aims of L2 education and identified factors influencing these beliefs. The alignment of their beliefs with learner-centredness was evaluated and mapped. Teachers' beliefs about the aims of L2 education need, however, to be understood in conjunction with their other educational beliefs, which will be detailed in the following sections.

4.3 Beliefs about learners, the teacher and learner–teacher (L–T) relationships

This section moves from teachers' beliefs about the aims of L2 education to their beliefs regarding learners, the teacher and L–T relationships (for an overview, see Table 4.3). The most widely shared beliefs are teacher beliefs about learner differences and about teachers' presenting their real selves. Teachers' views diverged regarding teacher authority and the attribution of failure. Each of these beliefs is explained in detail.

Table 4.3 Beliefs about learners, the teacher & L–T relationship

Beliefs about learners, the teacher & L–T relationships	Anli	Bailin	Chen	Dongmei	Enya	Fang	Guiyun
Learners							
• Learners are different from one another, having different backgrounds and prior learning, learning habits and capacities	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
The teacher							
• Teachers are role models who will exert great impact on students	Y						Y
• Teachers' mentality, attitudes, and feelings towards individual students will influence students greatly		Y	Y		Y	Y	Y
• Teachers should not be authority figures in front of students, but normal people equal to students who are also prone to making mistakes	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y
• Teachers should present their real self to the student, sharing with students their true feelings	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
• When things go wrong, teachers should reflect on own practice first		Y	Y		Y	N	
L–T relationship							
• Interpersonal relationship is an important factor determining whether teaching is successful	Y			Y			Y
• Communication is of primary importance when dealing with interpersonal relationship	Y	Y		Y			Y

Legend: Y = a belief held by the participant; N = a belief is not held by the participant; Blank = the belief is not applicable to the participant

4.3.1 Learners

Learners are unique individuals with distinct personalities and characteristics, varying greatly in their innate ability, intelligence, preferences, learning styles and habits, backgrounds and prior learning. This view of learners was articulated by all seven teachers, each emphasizing different aspects of individual learners. For example, Bailin

thought the distinct personalities and characteristics of individual learners 'should be allowed and encouraged as long as they do not hinder others or cause harm'. She also felt that students varied greatly in their prior learning, habits and attitudes as they come from different primary schools:

> The importance attached to English varies from teacher to teacher and from school to school. Therefore some students have a good English foundation where others may completely lack any (Bailin).

Other participants echoed Bailin regarding prior learning. For example,

> There is huge discrepancy in terms of students' level of English, which challenges middle school teachers, especially Year 7 teachers, as some students do not even know the alphabet while others may have had a sound base in English (Anli).
>
> Students vary greatly in their English foundation, some not knowing a word when they first come. It is understandable (Dongmei).

After years of teaching, Guiyun believed that everyone is different in their innate ability and preferences. Some may be better at music, maths, or languages; others may be willing to use their hands rather than their brain. To Guiyun, student differences appropriately cater for various career demands in society, as she explained that:

> Not everyone will study anything as well as others, as otherwise it is impossible to have different careers in the society (Guiyun).

Therefore, teachers should 'try their best to encourage students', emphasizing that 'hard work counts more than natural endowment' and 'practice makes perfect'.

Dongmei's view resembled Guiyun's regarding students' learning styles and preferences, saying that:

> Students vary greatly … some have a suitable approach to learning, some do not, some take initiative in learning, some only passively follow what the teacher or parents require … some do well in maths and Chinese, even though they are not very good at English (Dongmei).

Having such understanding of individual differences, the participants generally had a positive profile of the learners, believing that if students were not good at learning

English, it did not mean that they were not good students (Dongmei) or 'hopeless' (Guilin). Teachers should not look down upon those who did not do well in study as:

> For those who cannot enter university does not mean that they do not have a good future. Some may end up doing better than those who may have been at the top at school (Enya).

They generally held that teachers should try their best to cater for individual differences and needs in teaching, caring for all of them and supporting them to improve:

> No one can be 100% fair, but teachers should have a 'scale' in mind and try their best to treat students fairly, no matter who the students are and how they study (Guiyun).
>
> For those students who are not doing well, teachers should be sensitive about how they deal with them, avoiding negative effects such as loss of confidence, giving up study, or becoming antagonistic to the teacher (Chen).
>
> Teachers should not deny or ignore those who appear to be somewhat slower than others in learning [as] it is highly possible that they are capable of making great progress with their effort (Enya).
>
> It might be a question of habitual action. The students cannot really be labelled as bad students; they may only need more attention and care (Dongmei).
>
> Given enough time and energy, every student could improve and study well with teacher's support (Bailin).

However, Fang seemed to have a negative profile of the learners and attributed some students' inability to learn well to individual differences: Whether students can learn well or not to a great degree depends on themselves, whether they are willing to learn and whether they follow the teacher's teaching, whether they are interested in the subject, regardless of their background and prior learning.

> Students vary greatly in their capacity and ways or habits of learning, as well as family background and prior learning, which influence greatly how well they can learn (Fang).

She further explained that some students simply cannot spell a single word right in dictation and supported her view with comments obtained from some parents:

> Their parents said that they knew their child would not be able to study well, but they had no choice but to send them to school, thinking that school is the only place for the child to go, as they are too young to start work (Fang).

In summary, teachers generally believed that learners were unique individuals with varied characteristics, backgrounds and prior learning, and these differences should be catered for in teaching. Most participants held a dynamic view on the development of learners, believing that teachers and education could make a difference for the learners. Fang was the only exception, as she seemed to believe that nature determined ability. Teachers expressed their views on learners mainly based on their teaching experience, as inferred from their words or directly stated by them (Guiyun).

Having started with teachers' views regarding the learner, the next part explores their views about themselves as teachers.

4.3.2 The teacher

The belief that teachers are role models who exert great influence on students is inferred from Anli's and Guiyun's data. Anli noticed that 'Students pay close attention to teachers that they like or admire, and would imitate them consciously'. Their learning style would be influenced by teachers:

> … especially their class teacher, whose characteristics, style of teaching and managing the class have strong impact on the style and landscape and features of the class (Anli).

Guiyun believed that modelling works better than preaching, so she would prefer to 'model and exert a subtle influence on the students', believing that 'in time, students would pick it up'. For example, whenever she made a mistake or misunderstood the students, she would apologize for it, aiming to model a 'common sense' attitude towards 'making mistakes' and how to deal with them. She believed that students would not look down upon her but respect her more.

The belief that teacher mentality and attitudes towards individual students influence students greatly was strongly emphasized by Guiyun and shared by Chen, Fang, Enya and Bailin. Guiyun regarded it:

> … a gaffe and a failure of the teacher if he or she loses his or her temper, acts or speaks rudely, or showers abuse on students, which will influence the students in a negative way (Guiyun).

Therefore, she thought that teachers should be able to control themselves and be careful about their words and attitudes to students, especially when they were angry. She upheld the view that teachers should 'always present their best side to students whatever happens to them in their lives'. 'After all', she said, 'students are not the vent or dustbin of the teachers'. Similarly, Fang commented that:

> Teachers should be able to control themselves well, not showing bad mood to students no matter what happens … if students say something that makes the teacher unhappy, the teacher should not take it seriously, as they are young and unthinking, if the teacher fusses about it or abuses them, they will never dare to speak to the teacher again (Fang).

Chen also commented that teachers need to be careful about their ways of talking to students, thinking about whether their approach was acceptable to students or whether it would cause negative feelings, which in turn would have negative impact on class teaching. Enya said that she would not bring her mood into the class, after all 'life is life and work is work' and a lesson is just 45 minutes 'so the teacher is not supposed to influence students' mood in a negative way'.

The belief that teachers should not be authority figures in front of students was fully espoused by Anli, Bailin and Guiyun. Anli held this belief due to observation of her mentor when she was a novice teacher. She recalled that even though her mentor was experienced:

> He was too authoritative and far away from the students. So the students obeyed him out of fear or coercion. That's why the good effect didn't last long (Anli).

She did not want to be like her mentor, thus had this anti-apprenticeship observation belief.

Bailin also believed that teachers should:

> Let students know that teachers are normal people, equal to them and try to communicate with them equally (Bailin).

Guiyun commented that the students and she 'are always equal to each other' and she 'never pulls her rank on the students', always telling the students that teachers are not 'God' but normal people who also make mistakes. She pointed out that sometimes the students might know more than teachers in some aspects, as:

> Nowadays information is accessible through so many channels and, as younger people, the students are more receptive than teachers so they may know more than the teachers about something such as the multimedia (Guiyun).

She remarked that therefore teachers should ask students for help when they really did not know something, believing that:

> The students will not only be glad and willing to help but also be more willing to get closer to the teacher (Guiyun).

In comparison, the other four participants seemed to be more conservative regarding teacher authority. For example, Dongmei thought that teachers need to have 'a balanced authority and affinity with students', stating that in class she needed the authority so that when she was teaching and explaining important points, the students would listen carefully, while after class, teachers needed to have affinity to make students relaxed. Chen also believed that 'teachers should have authority in front of students, having strict discipline and requirements'. Fang maintained that 'teachers should be strict and serious in class when necessary … [as] … if teachers are more serious and fierce, there would be fewer discipline problems in the classes'. Enya explained that:

> If the teacher is too democratic, problems will arise regarding class discipline and the class will be out of order (Enya).

Therefore, for these four teachers, teacher authority seemed to be something necessary to reduce discipline problems and keep students focused.

All the teachers, no matter the position they took regarding teacher authority, held the belief that teachers were normal people equal to students and will also make mistakes.

They all reported that they would not try to hide their mistakes. Instead, some would directly tell or correct the mistake with the students or let students find out the mistakes, using their mistakes as a learning opportunity to facilitate noticing, arouse awareness, or model useful attitudes towards one's mistakes.

They all believed that teachers should present their real selves and share their true feelings with the students. For example, Anli once wrote an article entitled *Also let students share teacher's feelings*, arguing that:

> Rather than reprimanding students, it is better to let students understand that teachers are also normal human beings, who will also have trouble or difficulties when they will need students to support or help them out (Anli).

She recalled that when she was pregnant about ten years ago, she was having a difficult time and would often need to run out of the classroom to vomit, sometimes she could not even inform the students first. So she told the students about it and told them that she was feeling awful and needed their understanding and support. Ever since then, whenever she ran out, the English subject representative would immediately go to the front to lead the whole class to do some reading aloud. This touched her so greatly that she reflected and wrote this article.

Bailin commented that:

> No need to disguise! We are now striving for equality in educational settings. The teacher needs to present the real self to the students, letting them know that the teacher is just a normal person, not god … Sometimes if students did something that makes you sad, you can tell them directly that what they have done made you sad (Bailin).

Bailin believed that by presenting the real self and sharing with students their feelings, teachers could help students to learn to deal with interpersonal relationships, which was one of the aims for teaching that she embraced.

Enya prefers to present her real self to the students saying that:

> If I am really not feeling well, I would probably tell the students so that they would be understanding and be more cooperative (Enya).

Dongmei also said that most of the time she prefers to present her real self to the students, sharing her feelings with students to gain their understanding.

Teachers should reflect on their own practice first when things go wrong. This belief was expressed by Bailin, Chen and Enya, but contradicting Fang's belief. Bailin commented that:

> The students are only kids who are very young, if something is wrong, it must be the adults who have done something wrong first. Therefore, I will first examine myself before examining elsewhere to identify where the problem lies (Bailin).

Enya believed that if students lacked motivation, the primary reason might be that they did not understand. Therefore, teachers needed to adjust their way of teaching accordingly. Chen thought teachers should try out various ways until they found an effective way to approach the 'problem students'. She believed that 'teachers can make a difference and influence the students to greater or lesser degree, if they try'. By contrast, Fang thought that if a problem arose, for example, students not learning, not interested, or not progressing, the problem lay more with the students rather than the teacher, believing that she had tried her best to teach and help the students.

In summary, the beliefs about teachers were: the importance of teachers' attitudinal quality towards the students (Guiyun, Chen, Fang, Enya, Bailin), teachers' influence on students as a role model (Anli, Guiyun), teachers having an 'equal position' with the students (Anli, Bailin, Guiyun) as compared to an authority figure, teachers being an essential factor to ensure effective teaching (Dongmei) and reduce discipline problems (Chen, Fang, Enya). All the teachers regarded making mistakes as human and all preferred to present their real selves to the students. Beliefs were not shared regarding the attribution of students' creating problems or not learning. Fang possessed the opposite belief to three other teachers, believing that she was not the one responsible if problems arose. By contrast, the others, took a developmental perspective on the learners (Bailin), and the learning process (Enya) and would reflect on their own practice and make necessary adjustments if problems arose. Various factors were

reported or inferred to have influenced the participants' beliefs about the role of teachers. These included their past teaching experience (Guiyun), reflection on past teaching practice, anti-apprenticeship (Anli), their beliefs about effective teaching and classroom discipline, and the aim of teaching they embraced (Bailin).

The previous two subsections have provided an insight into teachers' beliefs regarding the learner and themselves as teachers. The next subsection will explore teachers' beliefs regarding the relationships between the learners and the teacher.

4.3.3 Learner–Teacher (L–T) relationships

The belief that interpersonal relationships are an important factor determining whether teaching is successful was shared by Anli, Dongmei and Guiyun. Anli discovered through observing other teachers' practices that:

> … in order to increase the grades of the whole class, besides working hard, another important factor is to win the children's hearts … once you have won their hearts, they will be happy to follow you and do whatever you want them to do or accept your words or comments from their hearts (Anli).

Otherwise, as she reflected on her observation of her mentors and other colleagues, 'no matter how hard-working a teacher is, the teaching effect will not be good'.

Dongmei was influenced by her high school and university teachers, believing that:

> A good relationship between the teacher and students is very important so that the student will feel interested in the subject even after class rather than disliking it (Dongmei).

Therefore she tried her best to get along well with the students so that the students would trust her and tell her about their ideas and thoughts. Dongmei believed that '[I] f students have positive feelings towards the teacher, they would be more willing to take initiative in learning'. This point is shared by Guiyun who stated that 'students are more willing to learn from and listen to the teacher that they admire'. Therefore, she commented that rather than telling students to show respect to them simply because they were teachers, teachers should 'earn students' respect' so that the students would really

admire them from their heart and would be willing to listen to them. To ‘earn respect’, Guiyun believed that teachers should ‘keep improving themselves in terms of knowledge, perspectives and ways of being’.

Another belief was that communication is important in dealing with interpersonal relationships. This belief was shared by Anli, Bailin, Dongmei and Guiyun. Anli believed that ‘real heart-to-heart communication’ with the students was important and effective not only in making students understand teachers and be sympathetic to teachers, but also in ‘solving problems and eliminating misunderstandings’.

Similarly, Bailin expressed that:

> In order to clear misunderstandings, solve problems and help students improve, good communication and cooperation [with parents and students] is important (Bailin).

Therefore, she commented that rather than making students afraid of them and not daring to express themselves, teachers should encourage students to express their ideas and feelings through ‘open communication like friends’. This would, as she believed, ‘enhance students’ ability to communicate and socialize with others’, cultivating ‘a sound character’ in students. Such a belief was mainly influenced by her experience in life, especially her reflection on her experience as a child who had problems dealing with interpersonal relationships.

Dongmei also preferred to communicate with students equally, believing that ‘students will feel respected and cared for and thus will trust the teacher’. With years of teaching experience, Guiyun held that ‘it is better to communicate and reason with the students privately’ and she had never had any scolding attitudes towards students, as ‘students may close their hearts simply because of a careless word from the teacher’.

In summary, four teachers have pointed to the importance of establishing positive relationships with students (Dongmei), winning their hearts (Anli) and gaining their respect (Guiyun) and trust (Dongmei). The way to establish such relationships is through open, respectful and caring communication (Dongmei, Bailin), encouraging

students to express their ideas and feelings (Anli). They have such beliefs due to collegial influence or anti-apprenticeship experience/notions (Anli), past schooling experience (Dongmei) and teaching experience (Guiyun), or due to the espoused aims of teaching and the reflection on one's own childhood and life experience (Bailin).

4.3.4 Summary and discussion

From a learner-centred perspective, learners are unique individuals with different capacities, characteristics, preferences and backgrounds, but everyone is capable of learning and taking responsibilities. Teachers are not authority figures, but normal people equal to the students. The teacher and students are partners and co-creators of the learning experience with the attitudinal qualities which exist in the personal relationship between the teacher and the learner being a key factor influencing learning (see Section 2.4). The degree to which the seven teachers' beliefs about learners, teacher and the L–T relationship align with learner-centredness is mapped out in the matrix in Table 4.4. Fang's beliefs aligned only to a little degree with learner-centredness; Chen's, Dongmei's, and Enya's beliefs were to some degree learner-centred; while Anli's, Bailin's and Guiyun's beliefs were aligned to a great extent with learner-centredness.

Table 4.4 Alignment of beliefs with learner-centeredness – Learners, teacher and the L–T relationship

Category of teacher beliefs	Alignment with learner-centredness			
	Hardly	A little	Some extent	Great extent
Learners, teacher and the L–T relationship		F	C D E	A B G

Legend: A – Anli; B – Bailin; C – Chen; D – Dongmei; E – Enya; F – Fang; G – Guiyun

Overall, Fang held beliefs that were only to a little degree aligned with learner-centredness. She seemed to have a negative profile of the learners and attributed inability to the learner, despite her acknowledgement of learner individual differences, believing that teachers should cater for learner differences and that teachers' mentality and attitudes towards students influenced them greatly. She reported giving extra

support to students who were slow in learning, but limited to those students that she felt would possibly catch up. She maintained that if students were not learning or were causing problems, the problem must be lying more with the students rather than the teacher. In addition, she held that teacher authority is a necessity in reducing discipline problems.

Chen, Dongmei and Enya held beliefs that were to some extent learner-centred. They shared views about learner individual differences and teachers being their real selves in front of the students. They believed that: teachers' mentality and attitudes towards students influenced the students greatly, and therefore teachers should be careful about what and how they say or do something. They considered good interpersonal relationships a key to successful teaching, which could be achieved through open communication with students. They also held the view that when things go wrong, teachers should reflect on their own practices first (Chen, Enya). However, they were conservative about teacher authority and regarded teacher authority as a key factor to ensure classroom discipline and focus for students.

Anli's, Bailin's and Guiyun's beliefs to a greater extent aligned with learner-centred beliefs. Like all the other teachers, they believed that: teachers should cater for individual differences and support each learner to achieve progress; learners should be appreciated for who they are (Anli); learner individual personalities and characteristics should be encouraged (Bailin); and working hard counted more than natural endowment (Guiyun). In addition, they believed that teachers were role models exerting great impact on students (Anli, Guiyun) and their attitudes and feelings influenced students' greatly (Bailin, Guiyun). Regarding teacher authority, they thought that teachers were normal people equal to students and they preferred to present their real selves to the students. Finally, they maintained that when things go wrong, teachers should reflect on their own practice first (Bailin); good interpersonal relationships with students was the key to successful teaching (Anli, Guiyun); and such relationships could be achieved through open communication with students (Anli, Bailin, Guiyun).

The seven teachers held in common the belief that learners are unique individuals with varied characteristics, backgrounds and prior learning, and these should be catered for in teaching. This belief may have been influenced by the Confucius educational principle of *yin cai shi jiao* which literally means teaching a person based on his or her ability *(*Low, 2010*)*, or tailor teaching to cater for individual differences. For six of the teachers, individual differences are a starting point to explore effective teaching and learning while for Fang, they predict students' future learning outcomes. Fang's view that 'nature counts more than nurture' may put students with poor prior learning and background at risk of performing poorly, as her perception of the students may cause the *Pygmalion* effect, which refers to the phenomenon that higher expectations lead to an increase in performance while lower expectations lead to a decrease in performance (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). Fang's perspective has already been shown to influence her attribution of problems to students themselves rather than factors external to students.

The teachers have divergent views regarding teacher authority. Four participants see authority as an essential factor to ensure effective teaching (Dongmei) and reduce discipline problems (Chen, Fang, Enya). This finding is not surprising as, in the Confucius tradition, 'teachers see their role as guiding in the correct ways and do not hesitate to make their authority quite clear' (Biggs, 1998, p. 730). These teachers fall into the category of those with traditional authoritarian perspectives on classroom behaviour management (Johnson, Whitington & Oswald, 1994; Erwin, 2004). Assuming a deficit view of learners is also dominating recent discourse in Australia, the UK and the US, to the extent that Johnson and Sullivan (2016) call for 'answering back to such dominating discourse', with the effort to promote the 'liberal progressive' approach to classroom behaviour management (Johnson et al., 1994). Interestingly, three teachers in this study fall into this liberal progressive category. Taking an 'equal position' with the students (Anli, Bailin & Guiyun), these three teachers regarded positive relationships with students as a core premise for successful teaching.

As the data unfolded in this section, more factors were identified as influencing teachers' beliefs. These included teachers' reflection on their own childhood and life experience and their past teaching practice, their espoused aims of L2 teaching, their beliefs about effective teaching and classroom discipline, anti-apprenticeship observation and collegial influences. Awareness of these factors adds to our understanding of who the teachers are, what they believe and why. So far we have an understanding of what aims they each embrace for L2 education and how they perceive the learners, the teacher and the L–T relationship. Factors that have influenced their beliefs as reported by the teachers have also been identified. Nevertheless, these have just presented a partial picture of teachers' overall educational beliefs. With the analysis continuing in the next three sections, a more comprehensive picture will be unveiled. The next section will focus on the analysis of teachers' beliefs regarding learning and teaching.

4.4 Beliefs about learning and teaching

The previous two sections have analyzed and reported teachers' beliefs regarding the aims of L2 education, learners, the teacher and the L–T relationships. With this knowledge, this section explains what beliefs the teachers espoused regarding learning and teaching. An overview of these beliefs is provided in Table 4.5. Six conditions that the teachers believed facilitated learning and teaching are identified. These conditions include learning environment and classroom climate, individual differences, learning responsibility and freedom of choice, group work and peer teaching. Details of these teachers' beliefs are presented in this section.

Table 4.5 Teacher beliefs about learning and teaching

Beliefs about learning and teaching	Anli	Bailin	Chen	Dongmei	Enya	Fang	Guiyun
Learning environment and classroom climate • Learning is facilitated in a relaxed, caring, trustful, respectful and encouraging learning environment where there is a sense of unity, mutual care and students' participation and effort are valued.	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Individual differences • Learning is facilitated when the teacher appreciates or accepts students for who they are, catering for individual differences and supporting individual students to improve and (experience) success.	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Learning responsibility and freedom of choice • Learning is facilitated when learners are gradually given more responsibility for learning and freedom of choice	Y	Y		Y-			
Relevance and interest of learning • Learning is more effective when it is of personal relevance and interesting to learners.	Y	Y	Y-	Y-	Y-		Y-
Learners' taking initiative & active participation • Deep learning or significant learning takes place when students take initiative and participate actively in the learning process, meaning making and seeking understanding.	Y	Y					Y
Group/pair work and peer teaching • Group/pair work and peer teaching facilitate learning.	Y			Y-			Y

Legend: Y= a belief held or partly held by the participant; N= a belief is not held by the participant; Blank = the belief is not applicable to the participant

4.4.1 Learning environment and classroom climate

The first facilitative condition relates to the learning environment and classroom climate. The seven teachers as a cohort believed that learning is facilitated in a relaxed, caring, trustful, respectful and encouraging learning environment, with a sense of unity and mutual care, where students' participation and effort are valued. Each teacher emphasized different aspects. For example, that teachers should give constant encouragement and reward for participation and effort was emphasized by Anli, Bailin and Chen:

> [I] try my best to encourage students to open their mouths, and there is always applause no matter how the students speak as they feel (Anli).
>
> As long as they make progress, I will give instant encouragement; for those who are a bit shy, as long as they have the courage to raise their hand, I will praise them even if their answer is not correct (Bailin).
>
> Teachers should acknowledge students' effort, even though some students may not be doing so well in some aspects of study (Chen).

Qualities such as caring, respect and trust were emphasized by Bailin, Dongmei and Enya:

> The most important is care and respect for all … putting students at the same height [as teachers] (Bailin).
>
> Communicate with students on equal terms and make them feel respected and cared for, so they will trust the teacher (Dongmei).

Other aspects emphasized include: 'encourages democracy' (Enya), the importance of fostering 'a sense of unity and mutual care' among the students (Dongmei), 'a relaxed atmosphere in classes' where the students were not afraid of the teacher (Fang), caring about students' physical and psychological development (Bailin), making students enjoy the lesson more and 'be happy both physically and mentally' (Guiyun), as well as 'cultivating a sense of positive energy' in class, such as 'proactiveness, helpfulness and good manners' (Chen).

Teachers' beliefs regarding the learning environment and classroom climate were mainly influenced by teachers' empathy with the students as learners of a foreign

language, for example:

> It is likely that the students dislike learning English and dare not open their mouths to speak if teachers are too serious and harsh, as it is very hard for students to learn a foreign language, which is remote and strange to them, with so many new words and content (Anli)
>
> The students are under too much pressure nowadays and are anxious in the learning process; if teachers look serious all the time, the student will feel repelled by them and thus be unwilling to learn from them (Guiyun)

In summary, the prominent themes about the learning environment and classroom climate were: encouraging participation and rewarding effort (Anli, Bailin, Chen), attending to students' physical and mental wellbeing (Bailin, Guiyun), emphasizing mutual care, respect and trust (Bailin, Dongmei, Enya) as well as cultivating human virtues in students (Chen). Overall, a relaxed (Fang) and democratic (Enya) classroom climate with all the above features was reported as conducive to learning. Factors influencing teachers' beliefs included professional development recommendations and teachers' empathy with the students as learners of a foreign language.

4.4.2 Individual differences

The second facilitating condition for learning relates to individual differences. Teachers as a cohort generally believed that learning is facilitated when the teacher appreciates students for who they are, caters for individual differences, and supports individual students to improve and experience success, thus supporting the 'education with appreciation' principle proposed by the Chinese scholar Hong Zou. Anli once wrote an article named *Education with Appreciation in English Teaching*, and her belief was further confirmed and reinforced by the 2001 Curriculum Standards. Anli took a critical stance, pointing out the social phenomenon that 'students nowadays are praised too often', so 'teachers should also be critical' to help students identify where the problem lies and try to solve it, rather than 'purely praise and give encouragement'.

Bailin thought teachers should cater for students' preference, interests and needs, making learning happen in a natural manner. She remarked that this had been advocated

in the New Curriculum Standards and had been reinforced in various professional development programs and emphasized throughout the country. The other teachers' views resembled Bailin's.

> Every student is different and each person is dynamic, so teachers should cater for individual differences and try their best to help them to improve (Chen).
>
> Different kinds of students need different ways of motivation and teaching … teachers try their best to care for all of them and use different approaches to motivate and encourage students to learn regardless of their English foundation, even though it is challenging to do so (Dongmei).
>
> Students differ in their characteristics and personalities. I need to vary treatment accordingly, taking into consideration and catering for individual difference (Enya).

Holding such beliefs, teachers reported a range of ways to cater for individual differences and supporting students to improve. For example, Anli:

> … sought opportunities, purposefully but in a natural manner to get to know more about the students … incorporating such information into teaching to make learning more relevant and interesting (Anli).

Anli also made an effort to support individual students to improve and succeed by improving their motivation and confidence in learning English. Bailin commented that teachers should:

> … communicate with students, motivating and supporting them to achieve progress rather than giving up on students easily (Bailin).

Anli's and Bailin's words have shown a sense of determination to act 'despite various constraints … [and] despite the challenge to help all the slow students to catch up' (Anli) and 'the fact that students vary greatly in their prior learning, habits and attitudes' (Bailin).

Chen reported her approach of 'encouraging students with poor foundation' and 'trying out various ways to approach' those 'problem' students until an effective way was found. Enya would 'try different ways of teaching' to make learning easier to understand, or 'spend more time on them' and 'reason with them' about the importance of study, or vary requirements and give encouragement as appropriate. Guiyun reported

communicating privately with students, showing understanding and channelling students' thoughts, giving them guidance and helping them to set achievable goals. However, she remarked that it was hard and sometimes she did not know how 'given the conditions'.

Fang seemed to have been influenced greatly by contextual factors such as the large class size, the amount of content to be covered and time constraints. She explained that 'during class time, she had to take into consideration all the other students' and teach at the average level. Otherwise, the good students would lose interest, thinking it is a waste of time if she paid too much attention to the slow ones. For those who do not study hard, she could only talk and reason with them. If they do not listen, then she could not do anything about it, as quite a number of students only achieved 20% or 30% in a class.

In summary, teachers generally believed that learning is facilitated if teachers cater for learners' individual differences and support each of them to improve and succeed. Teachers should appreciate students for who they are and be critical to really help students develop (Anli). They should use various approaches to motivate learners and support them to improve (Anli, Bailin, Chen, Dongmei, Enya, Guiyun) and give extra support to slow learners (Enya, Fang). In addition, some reported incorporating information about individual learners into teaching to make learning more interesting and relevant to learners (Anli, Bailin).

4.4.3 Relevance, interest and accessibility of learning

The third condition that facilitates learning relates to the relevance, interest and accessibility of learning, namely learning is more effective when it is of an appropriate level of difficulty, personally relevant and interesting to learners. This belief can be fully inferred from Anli and Bailin's interview data and is partly shared by Dongmei, Guiyun, Chen and Enya. Anli and Bailin always thought about how to make the learning happen naturally, trying to make learning more relevant, interesting and

accessible to the students.

> …they [students] will find it more relevant if it is about them or things that belong to them … When I discover some students' interests or hobbies, I will ask them to introduce their interest or hobbies to the class when appropriate and relevant … (Anli).
>
> For Year 7s, interest is most important … what I often think about is how to make them accept the knowledge in a natural way, how to make it take place naturally so that they can learn it more quickly (Bailin).

Dongmei believed that 'interests are the most important' and always tried to think of approaches or ways of teaching that students can accept easily in planning. Guiyun thought that what students learn should be something that they can reach 'standing on their toes' and can enjoy, understand or accept. Dongmei's and Guiyun's beliefs were influenced by their understanding of what learner-centredness means.

As for the other participants, additional important factors to 'ensure the quality of the lesson' (Chen) were expressed as 'motivation firstly comes from interest' (Enya), and 'interest, appropriate level of difficulty, appropriate class design' (Chen).

In planning a lesson, Anli, Bailin and Dongmei reported having students in mind, trying to think of approaches or ways of teaching that students can accept easily or that are more accessible to the students. By contrast, Fang reported that when planning a lesson, she paid attention to what the students need to learn and the key or difficult points needed to pass the exam.

In summary, relevance, interests, appropriate level of difficulty are regarded as important for effective learning by these teachers, except for Fang. Driven by her teaching aim of preparing students for exams, Fang mainly focused on the important points that were likely to be tested in exams when planning lessons.

4.4.4 Learners be more active and do more telling

The fourth facilitating condition for deep learning or significant learning is when learners take the initiative and participate actively in learning and meaning making. This belief was shared by Anli, Bailin and Guiyun. Anli believed that if students tried to

figure out and explain why they are wrong, 'they will have deeper impression and understanding of it, which they will be less likely to forget'. To be able to explain their mistakes to her and earn back the points they have lost in a test, as Anli reported, students listened to her more carefully in class, actively seeking help from their peers, taking initiative to figure out why.

Anli reflected on her practice of being mainly the one to speak and tell, and decided that 'I can't be the one to tell, they must tell', meaning when students did not really understand well and would make the same mistakes again, even though paying attention and taking notes. She was greatly influenced by her own experience of being called upon by her father, who was her mathematics teacher in a middle school, to replace him as teacher when he had to attend a conference. She was not confident at first, but her father encouraged her and asked her to think first and then tell him how she would teach her classmates. Then her father gave her some feedback on how to improve it. She said that she would never forget how to deduce the median line of a trapezoid and she would remember that lesson all her lifetime. Anli's belief was further reinforced by the 2001 Curriculum Standards which advocate a learner-centred approach. This she found resonant with what she really espoused, commenting that:

> LCT has been reinforced again and again in different trainings and programs. I have been constantly thinking about it … making an effort to let students do the telling, explaining more (Anli).

Bailin believed that:

> Learning is deeper and more effective when students take the initiative to learn and absorb knowledge, as compared to the spoon-feeding approach (Bailin).

She reported making an effort towards the direction of:

> … letting students become active participants in the class and talking most of the class time while the teacher talks less (Bailin).

Bailin is now guiding students to develop their ability and habits, and will gradually let students 'do' the study more. She was much influenced by her professional learning

experience in university, where she enjoyed the English classes as:

> … the teachers would tell the students what they would teach and ask them to read books in advance and get prepared to be the ones to speak and explain what is being learnt (Bailin).

She remembered that sometimes when the content was too much to understand in class, she would look it up after class and seek for understanding, which she thinks was much more effective than being told about it. Bailin's belief was further reinforced by the learner-centred theory advocated in the Curriculum Standards.

Guiyun also believes that teachers should:

> … give students more opportunity [to speak and practice] and return the class to them [making them the main participants], letting them think for themselves (Guiyun).

According to her, she used to mainly teach according to the textbook, fixated on the exam, which is grammar-focused. However, she is making an effort to change her practice, even though she thinks it is a bit late (for Year 9s) already, believing students suffer if they sit and learn passively in the classroom.

In summary, a belief held by three teachers is that students learn better when taking the initiative and actively participating in the learning and meaning-making process (Anli, Bailin, Guiyun). To facilitate deep learning, teachers should do less telling and talking (Anli, Bailin), motivate students to seek for understanding (Anli) and give them opportunities to speak, practise English and do the learning (Bailin, Guiyun). These beliefs are influenced by teachers' schooling experience and influence of significant others (Anli), professional learning experience (Bailin) and their reflection on past teaching experience (Anli, Guiyun).

4.4.5 Learning responsibility and freedom of choices

The fifth condition for facilitating learning relates to learning responsibility and freedom of choice. The belief that learning is facilitated when learners are gradually given more learning responsibility and freedom of choice was held strongly by Anli and

Bailin and partly shared by Enya. Although all participants reported sharing with students the responsibility to manage the class, such as collecting homework and supervising text reciting, Anli was exceptional in that she was the only teacher who reported giving students responsibility for learning regarding the subject content of English. Anli 'demonstrated how to tackle new words' and then 'let students act as little teachers to explain the new words to the class'. The students were 'capable of covering nearly all' that she wanted to teach and expand. She also reported having students explain their mistakes to her so as to regain the points that they had lost in an exam, which engaged students in active learning. She even planned to make it more challenging by having students explain the mistakes in class 'as students have become one year older' and should be able to do so. Anli was strongly influenced by her middle school experience: She recalled that:

> The class teacher … gave me a lot of responsibility… I was responsible for such matters as talking to the classmates on her behalf, helping her with writing the reports about students… Sometimes I was in charge of having class meetings on behalf of the teacher (Anli).

When the teacher moved from the school and there was no one taking over their class, the principal asked her to help with the management of the class like a teacher, telling her to report to him directly if she had any problems or challenges that she could not deal with. As a young teenager, she felt so honoured to be chosen by the principal, but her parents were somewhat concerned, worrying that taking such responsibility would interfere with her study. However, under such pressure, she was motivated to study harder so that she could serve as an example and assist others in their study. At the end of High School she actually did well in study and was second of the whole school in the High School Entrance Exam.

Similarly, Bailin intended to gradually give students more learning responsibility such as explaining what was to be learnt by the class and making decisions about what homework to do. She maintained that teachers should gradually give more freedom of choice and responsibility for learning to students which:

> … facilitates students' ability to make decisions with an understanding of consequences and facilitates students' creativeness, ability to do things and activeness (Bailin).

Regarding teaching activities, Anli and Enya reported giving the students choices and taking their advice. For example, when Anli only wanted the students to recite a dialogue, two students told her they wanted to act it out and she agreed, saying that would be better. Anli and Enya reported allowing students choices regarding a lesson called *How do you make a banana milk shake?* They allowed students to take a juice extractor from home and demonstrate how to make a milkshake, explaining each step in English at the same time. At the end the whole class tasted the milkshake and they all enjoyed the lesson. Enya remarked that she would take students' suggestions if she thought it was reasonable, but 'there are too many students', so she 'cannot take everyone's advice'.

In summary, all the teachers involved students in sharing class management responsibilities. However, only three teachers expressed beliefs regarding making learning and teaching more effective by gradually giving learners more learning responsibility (Anli, Bailin) and freedom of choice (Anli, Bailin, Enya). This belief is influenced by past learning experiences as a middle school student (Anli), the aim of developing students' ability (Bailin) and possibly collegial influence (Enya).

4.4.6 Group/pair work and peer teaching

The sixth facilitating condition concerns the belief that group/pair work and peer teaching facilitate learning. This belief was held by Anli and Guiyun and partly inferred by Dongmei. Anli believed that group work and pair work were effective ways to motivate students to help each other. She gained this idea of group work and games not only from the Professional Development Program called 'National Training', but also from a professional development visit to a school in Shanghai and in Shandong where group work was organized very well and 'the students were highly motivated', 'helping each other if someone in their group did not know something'. The classes she observed

were smaller in size and thus easier to organize as compared to her own classes with over 50 students. Nevertheless, she applied group work activities in her classes and 'found it quite effective', even though it was still challenging to manage so many students. She would also suggest that her students turn to their peers for help outside the class when they did not understand something:

> Then I said would you go and ask your classmates for help? So he did … Letting them explain to other students in their own words, sometimes maybe more effective than us adults' explanation, as they have their ways of thinking (Guiyun).

Guiyun also believed that students are capable and effective in helping each other through peer coaching and scaffolding to facilitate learning, which may work better than the teacher's explanations. She reported letting students help those who still did not understand what was taught while she was short of time to stop and explain to them, believing that:

> It is beneficial for both the one to help and the one helped. As the one to help others needs to have a good understanding so as to be able to explain clearly, and they learn better once they explain to others. For the ones helped by others, they would find it easier to understand and are willing to listen to their peers, as students have similar ways of thinking or are at a similar cognitive level (Guiyun).

Dongmei believed in peer teaching as she reported that 'even approaching the graduation exam, she will always give students hope, care for the slow ones herself, or ask other students to help them'.

In summary, three teachers believed that group work and peer teaching facilitated learning. Their beliefs were mainly influenced by professional development, observing other teachers' practice (Anli), past teaching experience (Guiyun) and a solution for the teacher's limited time and energy (Guiyun, Dongmei).

4.4.7 Summary and discussion

This section has depicted the landscape of teachers' beliefs regarding learning and teaching. Six key conditions emerged as beliefs about facilitating effective learning and

teaching, ranging from the learning environment to learners taking initiative and responsibility for learning in group/pair work and peer teaching. From a learner-centred perspective, learning is facilitated in a safe environment with minimal external criticisms and perceived threats to learners' self-image, and teachers accept and appreciate learners for who they are, valuing their perspectives and catering for individual differences and needs, giving learners freedom of choice and responsibility for learning. Learning is also facilitated by meaningful social interaction and is more effective when it is goal-oriented, relevant and interesting to learners, engaging learners in active meaning making and participation (see Section 2.4). Based on the findings in this section, Anli and Bailin held the most beliefs aligned with learner-centredness, followed by Dongmei and Guiyun and then Chen, Enya and Fang (see Table 4.6).

Table 4.6 Alignment of beliefs with learner-centredness – Learning and teaching

Category of Teacher Beliefs	**Alignment with learner-centredness**			
	Hardly	A little	Some extent	Great extent
Learning and teaching		C E F	G D	A B

Legend: A – Anli; B – Bailin; C – Chen; D – Dongmei; E – Enya; F – Fang; G – Guiyun

Overall Chen's, Enya's and Fang's beliefs were only to a little degree aligned with learner-centredness. Besides the commonly held belief that learning is facilitated in a caring, respectful, trustful learning environment where individual differences are catered for and teachers encourage participation, they believed that teachers should be democratic (Enya), create a learner environment that is relaxed (Fang) and full of positive energy (Chen). Regarding effective learning or significant learning, they believed that relevance and interest are important (Enya) and an appropriate level of difficulty facilitates learning (Chen).

In comparison, Dongmei and Guiyun embraced more beliefs aligned with learner-centredness. Besides the common identified facilitative qualities such as care, respect and trust, Guiyun pointed out the importance of attending to students' physical

and psychological development, while Dongmei emphasized unity and mutual care in the classroom. In terms of effective learning or significant learning, they regarded the following qualities as important: appropriate level of difficulty, group work and peer teaching, relevance and interest (Dongmei) and learner self-initiation and active participation (Guiyun). However, neither of them mentioned learners taking responsibilities.

Anli's and Bailin's beliefs are to a great extent aligned with learner-centredness. Besides the commonly embraced qualities for a facilitative learning environment, they believed that gradually giving learners more responsibility for learning facilitates learning, and teachers should attend to students' physical and psychological development (Bailin). They regarded the following qualities as important to facilitate effective or significant learning: relevance and interest, an appropriate level of difficulty, learner self-initiation and active participation, and group work and peer teaching (Anli).

Teachers' beliefs about learning and teaching had been influenced by various factors, which, as mentioned earlier, need to be understood within each teacher's socio-cultural and historical context. For example, with their experience as an English learner and user, they generally expressed empathy with the students as learners of English as a foreign language and therefore wished to create a learning environment that was conducive to learning. This 'empathy' of non-native English speaking teachers resonates with findings in other research studies (e.g. Ma, 2012) and lends support to one of Medgyes' (1994) hypotheses that Non-native English speaking teachers are more empathetic to learners' needs and problems. For another example, Anli's schooling experience has had a profound influence on her beliefs about learners' capability of taking learning responsibilities. The influence of her father as math teacher in middle school as well as the importance of active learning influenced how she facilitated significant learning.

The contextual factors, or 'the conditions' (Guiyun), seemed unfavourable for catering to individual differences, as reported by some teachers. However, teachers responded to

these contextual factors differently. Anli, Bailin and Dongmei were more assertive, explaining that teachers should try their best to cater for individual differences, despite it being 'hard', 'challenging' and with 'various constraints'. This forms a striking contrast with Fang's perspective. For example, contextual constraints such as large class size and the large number of slow students were perceived as overwhelming and used by her to theorize her reported practice, such as selectively supporting students who were likely to catch up and her practice of 'teaching to the middle'. She seemed to have regarded this approach as a norm without questioning the viability of her own practice and exploring alternative ways. Guiyun seemed to be in the middle of a change process, remarking that it was hard and that she sometimes did not know how to cater for individual differences and support students to be successful 'given the conditions', and yet questioning and searching for better ways of teaching, reportedly making effort to change her practices to a more learner-centred way.

This section has analyzed teachers' beliefs about learning and teaching, identifying six conditions that teachers believed to be conducive to learning as well as various factors that have influenced teachers' beliefs. The next section continues to analyze the seven teachers' beliefs regarding content and resources, which will further add to the understanding of their overall educational beliefs.

4.5 Beliefs about content and resources

This section will uncover teachers' beliefs regarding content and resources. Table 4.7 provides an overview of the beliefs identified among the participants. Overall, the participants have a consensus view that textbooks and other resources should be used flexibly and adaptively to suit students' pace and needs. However, their beliefs diverge regarding whether covering the content is less important than teaching to students' real understanding and developing students' abilities.

Table 4.7 Teacher beliefs about content and resources

Beliefs about content and resources	Anli	Bailin	Chen	Dongmei	Enya	Fang	Guiyun
• Textbooks and other resources should be used flexibly and adaptively to suit students' pace and needs.	Y	Y	Y-	Y-	Y-	Y-	Y-
• Covering the content is less important than teaching to students' real understanding and developing students' ability	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y

Legend: Y = a belief held or partly held by the participant; N= a belief is not held by the participant

4.5.1 Flexibility and adaptability in using textbooks and resources

The teachers believed that textbooks and other resources should be used flexibly and adaptively to suit students' pace and needs. This belief is shared by all the participants but to varying degrees, with Anli and Bailin to a greater degree. Anli thought that the textbook was not quite suitable for the students of her province, demanding too much from students in terms of producing the language and learning too much vocabulary in one unit, in other words assuming a good foundation from a few years English background. However, in reality, 'some students do not even know all the 26 letters of the alphabet'. Therefore, she is now using the textbooks and teaching aids selectively, adapted flexibly to suit the students' pace and needs, taking into consideration time constraints and exams.

> I have to filter the activities, some I may not ask students to do … Time does not allow. Even the simple two minute activities may take 20 minutes in practice (Anli).

Anli thinks such time can be 'better used', and the new text book has made her think more about how to use it. Accordingly, she has changed her practice: rather than teaching according to the book, page by page, she filters it and synthesizes it to teach students skills and develop their abilities.

Bailin thinks teachers should facilitate learning by inputting their own ideas and

correlating the knowledge in the textbook with other aspects. She also thinks that teachers should use other resources to complement the textbooks and facilitate learning. For example, using multimedia, songs, activities and reading material for students to gain knowledge outside the textbooks.

The other participants generally reported selectively using textbooks and resources such as PowerPoint, video clips and complementary exercise books, making adjustments when necessary. Guiyun is an exception who reported using supporting resources and teaching aids like PowerPoints as they are. She commented 'not unnecessary, but no time nor energy to adapt it.' She also reported mainly:

> teaching according to the textbook and there is no time for expansion … [given the] huge amount of content in the textbook [and] … the generally poor English foundation of the students (Guiyun).

In summary, the seven teachers held the belief to varying degrees that textbooks and resources should be used flexibly and adaptably. Various factors have been reported as influencing or mediating the application of their beliefs, such as the high-level difficulty and vast amount of content of the textbook, general low level of prior learning of students in this province, the time constraints, and pressure to prepare students for exams. Anli's and Bailin's words reveal more agency or control over how to use the textbooks and resources to facilitate learning. Anli's belief was driven by a strong sense of catering for students' pace and needs, and making good use of the limited time, which is related to her belief about catering for individual difference, and about effective learning and teaching. Bailin's belief was driven by her commitment to facilitating learning by making learning relevant. In comparison, Guiyun seemed to have lower agency and was limited by various constraints, reporting using the textbooks or resources as they were.

4.5.2 Covering the content versus real understanding, interest and ability development

Covering the content is less important than teaching to students' real understanding and

developing students' interest and ability. This belief is inferred from the interview data of Anli, Bailin, Chen, Dongmei, and Guiyun. Anli thinks teachers should be more 'flexible in class, caring more about students' reactions and real understanding and learning', rather than 'following the lesson plans and pace strictly' to cover the planned content. If there is a 'critical teaching moment', she would 'seize it and make good use of it to emphasize something important'. Bailin thinks that textbooks have an important role in providing the basic knowledge and a standard regulating knowledge to be tested in the exams. Using textbooks as a foundation, 'teachers should develop students' ability'. Chen also thinks covering the content is less important than whether students have understood what is being taught. She perceives the content and pace as flexible and adjustable.

> Even though the teacher has lesson plans regarding what content to cover, if the teacher only cares about the pace of covering the content, while students do not really understand what is being taught, then it is a waste of time indeed (Chen).

Dongmei expressed her feeling about the challenge of making the class interesting while emphasizing all the important points that are likely to appear in exams. She reported the mismatch between the textbooks and the exams, the former being 'up to date, emphasizing the development of students' language ability' while the exams focus on grammar knowledge. She resorted to teaching according to exams as she felt obliged to keep up with the pace for exam preparation that is set by the school.

Similarly, Guiyun wished that she could experience the way of teaching advocated by the textbook to develop students' ability to speak and use English. However, perceiving the exams as the 'the baton', she tries to cover all the content, despite the content being too much, emphasizing what is likely to appear in exams, as teaching and learning is mainly judged based on the exam results. However, this way of teaching makes her feel anxious.

By contrast, Enya and Fang think that covering the content and keeping up with the pace is the priority in teaching. As for Enya, the textbook is of essential importance,

giving students a gist of what is to be learnt in a unit and providing content for students to recite or read aloud. Fang reported paying attention to the pace of covering the content as well as what the students need to learn and grasp in order to do well in exams, emphasizing the difficult points and important points regarding exams.

In summary, five of the teachers believe that learning should go beyond covering the content as opposed to the other two teachers who prioritize covering the content and keeping up with the pace. Anli's, Bailin's and Chen's words reveal a strong sense of teacher agency about how they use textbooks, while Dongmei and Fang expressed their feeling of being in a dilemma. The beliefs about the importance of developing students' abilities and/or interest concerned them although they both reported resorting to covering the content and teaching according to exams. Enya and Fang reported doing so without expressing any other concerns.

4.5.3 Summary and discussion

Teachers' beliefs converge regarding the flexible and adaptive use of content and resources, while their beliefs diverge regarding the function of the content. From a learner-centred point of view, content should have a dual function as a body of knowledge and as a medium to develop learning skills; textbooks and resources should be adapted to be developmentally appropriate, meaningful and relevant to students; and a wide variety of input and resources should be used to enrich and facilitate learning (see Section 2.4). The alignment of the teachers' beliefs with learner-centredness is presented in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8 Alignment of beliefs with learner-centredness – Content and resources

Category of teacher beliefs	**Alignment with learner-centredness**			
	Hardly	A little	Some extent	Great extent
Content and resources		E F	D G	A B C

Legend: A – Anli; B – Bailin; C – Chen; D – Dongmei; E – Enya; F – Fang; G – Guiyun

Enya and Fang believed that it is necessary to selectively use textbooks and resources, making adjustments when necessary. However, they prioritized covering the content with no concerns. Therefore, their beliefs are only to a little degree aligned with learner-centredness. Dongmei's and Guiyun's beliefs are to some degree learner-centred. Although they reported mainly focusing on covering the content, they expressed their concerns about how to cover the important points for exam purposes and at the same time keep the students interested and teaching in the way advocated by the up-dated textbooks.

Anli's, Bailin's and Chen's beliefs are highly consistent with learner-centred beliefs. They strongly believed that textbooks and resources should be used flexibly and adaptively as appropriate to students' needs and developmental level and that teaching to students' real understanding and ability development is more important than covering the content (Anli, Bailin), and that it is necessary to selectively use textbooks and resources, making adjustments when necessary and Chen prioritized real understanding to covering the content, perceiving the content and pace of instruction to be flexible and adjustable.

Overall, three sets of factors seem to have influenced or mediated teacher beliefs in this regard. First, their aims of teaching, especially the aim of developing students' ability (Anli, Bailin, Chen) has direct correlation to how they perceive the function of the textbooks. Second, the written and grammar focused exams have had considerable washback effect on teacher practice, some mainly teaching for the exams. Third, the commonly reported huge amount of content in the textbooks is a problem, since all needs to be covered as any single detail might be tested in exams (Guiyun), and it is the teacher's fault if something tested in exams is not covered by the teacher (Guiyun). Other factors include students' low English level and time constraints.

Textbooks are generally considered up-to-date, focusing more on listening and speaking as compared to previous textbooks, but contain too much content, and therefore are

considered not suitable for the learners, especially when exam results are the only criteria for judging learning and teaching. Various factors have been identified as influencing teachers' beliefs and/or mediating their application regarding the teaching of content. These include time constraints, the predetermined pace of teaching and exam schedule, the poor English foundation of the students, and more importantly, the perceived function and importance of exams, as well as the aims of teaching that each teacher embraces. These factors are commonly identified and discussed in research studies about China's curriculum reform and implementation (e.g. Li & Baldauf, 2011; Yan & He, 2012).

The contextual factors are once again perceived and responded to differently by different teachers. Anli, Bailin and Chen had beliefs that are more aligned with learner-centred beliefs. They also seemed to have more control over how to use the textbooks to facilitate learning. By contrast, Enya and Fang reside in the traditional way of practice, socialized or conditioned to ways of thinking and doing things, accepting the norms and common practice of teaching according to exams without questioning, making compromises of meaningful learning, students' interests and real understanding. What is worth pointing out is the dilemma that Dongmei and Guiyun are facing, especially Guiyun who emphasized her doubt and questions about the traditional ways of teaching, while feeling vulnerable in making a change, therefore suffering from not being able to teach as she wishes. For Guiyun, this reflects her values or professional ethics: doing her best for her students to avoid remorse. Her anguish about this dilemma shows how true to her conscience she is as a person and a teacher. Guiyun's reflection well illustrates the point that teaching is 'first and foremost a moral activity' (Buzzelli & Johnston, 2002, p. 8), which is not only to do with one's professional knowledge and expertise, but one's conscience and morality.

This section has presented teachers' beliefs regarding the function of content and resources, adding to the picture of teachers' overall educational beliefs. The findings shed light on teachers' uptake of the learner-centred philosophy advocated in the

curriculum reform and how teachers responded to the change process. The next section will present teacher beliefs regarding assessment of the learners and the learning process. Beliefs in this regard will make this picture of teacher beliefs more comprehensive, adding to the understanding of who the teachers are as a result of their beliefs.

4.6 Beliefs about assessment

The previous sections have provided insight into teachers' overall beliefs regarding aims of L2 teaching (Section 4.1), learners, the teacher and L–T relationships (Section 4.2), learning and teaching (Section 4.3), and content and resources (Section 4.4). We are now turning to explore the last categories of beliefs, which are beliefs about assessment. Four themes emerged regarding teacher beliefs in this regard (see Table 4.4). Assessment should be used both of and for learning is a belief inferred from the data of all the teachers except Enya. The teacher should systematically monitor students' progress to provide feedback on individual progress and to adjust teaching accordingly is a belief common to all the teachers. Three teachers mentioned and held divergent views regarding whether the teacher should use norm- or criterion-referenced assessment. Giving learners some control over assessment is a belief only identified in Anli's data. These beliefs are explained in detail.

Table 4.9 Beliefs about assessment

Beliefs about assessment	Anli	Bailin	Chen	Dongmei	Enya	Fang	Guiyun
• Using assessment both for and on learning	Y+	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y
• Systematically monitoring students' progress	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
• Using criteria-referencing assessment	Y	N					Y
• Giving learners some control	Y						

Legend: Y= a belief held or partly held by the participant; N=a belief is not held by the participant;
Blank = the belief is not applicable to the participant

4.6.1 Assessment for learning

That assessment should be used *for* learning in addition to *of* learning is a belief inferred from the data of all the teachers except Enya. They believed that assessment should not only be used to examine how well students have studied what has been taught, but to promote learning. Three ways of promoting learning with assessment are reported. These are: using exam results to facilitate reflection, making use of exams to motivate students in active learning and thinking, and using formative assessment to monitor students' progress and motive students to learn.

First, using exam results to facilitate student and/or teacher reflection is mentioned by all seven teachers. They reported using exam results for students to reflect on 'what they haven't learnt' (Dongmei), 'haven't done well enough', 'what kind of mistakes they often make' (Chen) and their own 'learning effectiveness' (Guiyun), and for teachers to reflect on 'what needs improving in their own teaching' (Dongmei) or what aspects need to be emphasized (Fang), so as to 'give guidance or suggestions' to students (Chen). By contrast, Enya thinks that exams are mainly for monitoring how well students have studied what is taught, and she reported only using the marks to encourage students to do better the next time.

Second, making use of exams to motivate students in active learning and thinking is inferred in Anli's data. She reported asking students to explain and demonstrate understanding of the questions that they have done incorrectly in the exams in order to increase their grades by 'earning points back' with hard work. The students were:

> enthusiastic about it and really took the initiative and put effort into it, as they knew that they could make up for their mistakes and increase their marks (Anli).

Anli was influenced by reflection on her own practice, her father's influence when she was in middle school, as well as the influence of the Chinese scholar Zou Hong, who dealt with his daughter's mistakes in exam papers in a similar way.

Third, using formative assessment to monitor progress but also to motivate students to

learn is inferred from Anli's and Dongmei's data. Anli reported using formative assessment on the subject content. She uses an everyday class report as formative assessment of students' oral English ability, even though not required by the school. Dongmei reported giving students points as rewards, for example, when reciting the text well or taking the initiative to recite, saying that:

> They care about their scores rather than other tokens such as lollies. So I reward them whichever way they enjoy (Dongmei).

In summary, all teachers but Enya believe that assessment should be used to promote learning, which can be achieved by using exam results to facilitate reflection and adjustment of learning and teaching, making use of exams to motivate students in active learning and thinking (Anli), and using formative assessment to promote learning (Anli, Dongmei). Among them, Anli is the only teacher who reported incorporating formative assessment to monitor and promote the development of students' English speaking ability. These beliefs were influenced by their schooling experience, influence of significant others, and apprenticeship observation, past teaching experience and aims of teaching.

4.6.2 Constant monitoring of students' progress

Constant monitoring of students' progress is necessary to provide feedback on individual growth and to adjust teaching practices accordingly. This belief is commonly shared. For example, Bailin reported doing her best to:

> monitor and evaluate students' study state, development and changes in their attitudes constantly, through students' performance in weekly tests or unit tests, their answering the questions in class (Bailin).

Bailin cares about students' psychological changes, 'varying her treatment accordingly', which reflects her beliefs about individual learners and the importance of catering for individual learners' needs and differences.

Similarly, Chen thinks that although it is impossible to reach every aspect and every student due to the size of the class, teachers should constantly observe the students to:

> adjust their own methods accordingly, varying practices towards different students, using ways that are effective and easy to accept by students (Chen).

Others reported constantly monitoring and evaluating students' progress through dictation, unit tests, and/or in class observation so as to give encouragement as appropriate to different students in different aspects (Anli, Dongmei, Guiyun), to adjust teaching accordingly (Anli, Fang), and to inform parents about their children and gain parents' support and cooperation in supervising their children (Enya).

In summary, teachers commonly regard the systematic monitoring of students' progress as necessary. They have different purposes, ranging from giving feedback and encouragement tailor-made for individual students, adjusting teaching accordingly, to informing parents and gaining their support and cooperation. Whatever purposes, their beliefs were influenced by their beliefs about the importance of catering for individual needs and differences.

4.6.3 Criterion-referenced assessment

Students should be judged based on individual progress rather than compared against others. This belief is held by Anli, Chen and Guiyun, while Bailin held an opposite view. Anli thinks:

> If a student obtained 39 marks in the previous exam, and only 40 in the current one, I would still feel happy for the progress made, even though small and would encourage the student (Anli).

This is influenced by her belief about individual differences and by the current teacher evaluation system adopted by her school, in which teachers are evaluated by the improvement of the scores of students compared to their previous scores. In the past, her school used to evaluate teachers and teaching based on the mean and sum of the scores in exams, so teachers only wanted to teach better classes. Ever since the new

evaluation system, most teachers would prefer to teach average classes which may have more potential to improve. Guiyun resonates with Anli, thinking that:

> Students should be assessed based on individual development rather than ranked or evaluated in comparison with others. Grades are not the only or final thing to judge students by as those who do not do well in study may do well in other areas (Guiyun).

By contrast, Bailin holds the opposite view. According to Bailin, 'even though ranking students is not advocated, students need to know where they are and how competitive they are'. Therefore:

> Unified exams are necessary and important, projecting where the students are in relation to other students and how competitive they are, given the importance of the High School Entrance Exams (Bailin).

Bailin further commented, 'frustration in education, in China, is to some degree a way to increase students' competitiveness. Otherwise they never know how competitive they are'.

In summary, Anli and Guiyun agreed that students should use criterion-referenced assessment. Anli held this belief thanks to managerial influence: the way teachers are evaluated in her school. Possessing the same belief, Guiyun believes that it is not viable to evaluate students as compared to others based on exam scores. Working in the same school as Anli, Bailin possesses the opposite view, believing that it is necessary for students to be compared with others, knowing how competitive they are, experiencing frustration or sense of failure, as this is the social reality that they are going to face at work in the future.

4.6.4 Learner control regarding assessment

Giving learners some control regarding assessment facilitates learning. This belief is only inferred from Anli's reported practice of a class report activity, which allows some freedom of choice, according to individual preference and style. Students are required to take turns to do an oral presentation as an assessment task at the beginning of the first lesson each day. They can decide on the when, what and how to do it, whether to do it

individually or in groups and whether to tell stories, present a dialogue, or whatever forms they prefer. She believes this practice is beneficial to students, who enjoy it and take it seriously, spending time practicing and preparing for it. In a word, experience has told Anli that allowing learners some control over assessment facilitates their learning.

4.6.5 Summary and discussion

From a learner-centred perspective, students' progress should be monitored continually in order to provide feedback on individual growth and progress; diverse forms and choices should be provided and learner input incorporated; assessment experiences should be used to promote learning by focusing on learning processes. The alignment of teachers' beliefs regarding assessment are evaluated and mapped out in Table 4.10. Enya's and Fang's beliefs were only to a little degree aligned with learner-centredness. Anli's beliefs were to a great extent aligned with learner-centredness, while the other five teachers were in between, with their beliefs to some degree learner-centred.

Table 4.10 Alignment of beliefs with learner-centeredness – Assessment

Category of Teacher Beliefs	**Alignment with learner-centredness**			
	Hardly	A little	Some extent	Great extent
Assessment		E F	B C D G	A

Legend: A – Anli; B – Bailin; C – Chen; D – Dongmei; E – Enya; F – Fang; G – Guiyun

Based on the analysis in this section, teachers, apart from Enya, commonly believe that assessment should be used *for* learning and that systematic monitoring of students' progress is necessary for further improving teaching and learning. Enya thought that exams were mainly used as *of* learning, to monitor how well students have studied what is taught. She monitored students' progress mainly to inform parents about students' changes so as to gain better cooperation from parents. Fang only focused on diagnosing what (linguistic) area needs to be emphasized so as to re-emphasize in teaching. Therefore, their beliefs were only to a little extent aligned with learner-centredness.

Bailin's, Chen's and Dongmei's beliefs were to some extent aligned with learner-centredness. Besides systematically monitoring students' progress they believed that exams and assessment should be used for learning as well. They reported using exam results to facilitate student and teacher reflection (Chen, Dongmei, Guiyun) and using formative assessment to motivate and facilitate learning (Dongmei).

In comparison, Anli's beliefs were to a great extent aligned with learner-centredness. She believed that assessment should be used both for and of learning. She was the only teacher who reported using formative assessment regarding subject-content areas, giving learners some control regarding the assessment. She reported using assessment to motivate active learning and believed that teachers should systematically monitor students' progress so as to give encouragement as appropriate to different students in different aspects and adjust teaching accordingly. Besides, Anli maintained that students should be evaluated based on their individual progress rather than compared with others.

Various factors were identified as influencing teachers' practices regarding assessment, including:

- schooling experience
- influence of significant others
- apprentice observation
- past teaching experience
- organizational practice of evaluating teachers
- teachers' concern about the future social reality that the students will face
- espoused aims of teaching
- beliefs about the importance of catering for individual needs and differences
- beliefs about effective teaching.

Giving learners some control is only reported by Anli, which she believed to be effective in facilitating active learning. This belief, as generated from her practice, was first influenced by her observation of other teachers' classes when she was a novice teacher. However, it was her reflectiveness, adaptiveness as well as her beliefs about

effective learning and teaching that made her adapt their activity to an assessment task, involving all the class to give feedback and a grade for the presenters. She adapted the form by asking students to give a short speech in whatever form the student would like to choose. Her success in this practice further reinforced her belief that allowing learners some control over assessment facilitates learning. She was the only teacher who used formative assessment on the subject content area to monitor and promote the development of students' English speaking ability. Anli's practice of going beyond what is required by the school indicates the high degree of 'flexibility' she perceived to occupy her 'perceived curriculum decision-making operational space', and make decisions for which she is responsible (Smith, 1983, p. 29). Bailin, for example, challenged the traditional projection of a good student and the practice of merely focusing on achieving a good exam result while ignoring their development and needs in other aspects. She was deeply influenced by her own schooling experience and the experience of one student she once taught. The recurrent critical remarks in Bailin's interview point to the value-laden nature of teaching, which is a 'cultural, moral, social, and political practice' (Crookes, 2015, p. 486).

Regarding norm-referenced or criterion-referenced assessment of students, Anli and Guiyun expressed the belief that students should be judged based on their own progress. This belief resonates with their beliefs regarding learners' individual differences. Taking such a stance, teachers are more likely to encourage students to work to improve their own standards compared to their own previous work rather than competing with other students, the former being more conducive to students' well-being and psychological development. The organizational practice of Yizhi Secondary School on teacher evaluation has had a great impact on Anli's belief. However, working in the same organization, Bailin holds the opposite view, strongly maintaining that students need to know their competitiveness. This belief seems to run contradictory to learner-centred philosophy. However, Bailin was influenced by her concerns about the social reality that the students will face in the future, which she believed that the

students should be prepared for. She raised the concern in the light of social reality, which she believed should be spoken of more. This is a critical and disputable point of view and whether this view will influence Bailin's practice in a way that causes negative impact on the students is to be explored in future chapters.

4.7 Findings and discussion

This Chapter has analyzed and reported teachers' overall educational beliefs as well as factors influencing these beliefs. Great variation has been identified among different teachers' beliefs, despite working in two similar school contexts. The degree to which their beliefs are aligned with learner-centredness have been evaluated with the framework of learner-centredness (see Section 2.4) and mapped out in five matrices. The matrices are now synthesized in Table 4.11 to provide an overview of teachers' beliefs in relation to learner-centredness.

Table 4.11 Alignment of beliefs with learner-centredness – Overview

Categories of Teacher Beliefs	**Alignment with Learner-centredness**			
	Hardly	A little	Some extent	Great extent
Aims of L2 teaching		D F	C E G	A B
Learners, the teacher and the L–T relationships		F	C D E	A B G
Learning and teaching		F	C D E	A B G
Content and resources		E F	D G	A B C
Assessment		E F	B C D G	A

Legend: A – Anli; B – Bailin; C – Chen; D – Dongmei; E – Enya; F – Fang; G – Guiyun

Overall, Anli's and Bailin's espoused beliefs to a great extent align with learner-centredness while Fang's only to a little extent. The degree to which each individual teacher's beliefs align with learner-centredness varies across different categories of beliefs, except for Anli, whose beliefs consistently to a great extent aligned with learner-centredness.

Teachers' overall beliefs need to be understood together as a dynamic interactive system with each belief interacting with other beliefs. For example, Bailin's belief regarding the learner taking responsibility was influenced by the L2 teaching aim regarding development of learners' abilities (see Section 4.3.5), teachers' beliefs regarding content and resources were influenced by their beliefs about effective facilitation of learning regarding catering for individual difference and/or their beliefs about aims of teaching regarding facilitating development of learners' abilities (see Section 4.4.4).

Apart from the internal interaction of a teacher's different belief components, various factors were identified as influential. These factors include: general schooling experience, professional learning experience, experience as an English learner and user, past teaching experience, in-service professional development training, mentoring, and learning, colleague influence, organizational influence, influence of significant others. Even when two teachers share a particular belief, their reasons may vary greatly, as influenced by their unique experience and background.

Adding to the complexity, although espousing a certain belief, in practice teachers may not act in accordance with their belief. This occurs when contextual factors seem to the teachers not to be favourable for catering to individual difference, for example the large class size, the challenging and abundant content of the textbook, the nature of exams, and the poor prior learning of students. This lends support to Borg's (2003) suggestions that such contextual factors might hinder teachers' ability to teach according to their beliefs. Nevertheless, this study shows that contextual factors have been perceived and responded to differently by each teacher. This finding suggests that it is teachers' perception about the contextual factors that forms a mediating influence on teachers' application of their beliefs. The complex relationship between teachers' beliefs system, factors influencing teacher beliefs and factors mediating the application of their beliefs is conceptualized in Figure 4.1.

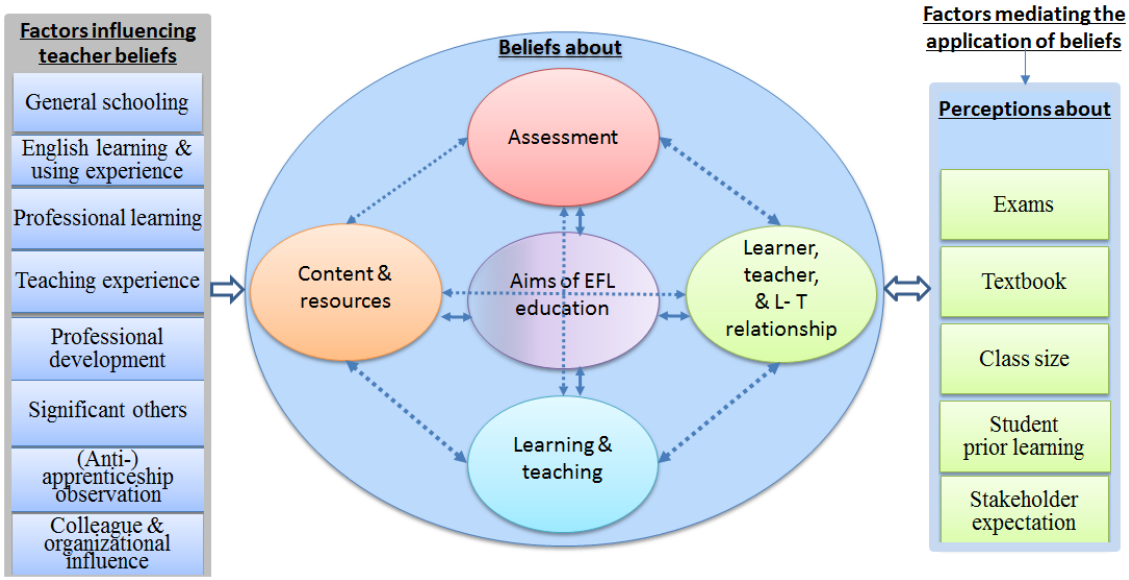


Figure 4.1 Teacher beliefs and related factors

On the left side of the figure are factors influencing teacher beliefs. Teachers have different beliefs due to their own individual background and experience. Understanding teachers' beliefs in relation to factors that have influenced their beliefs provides an insight into the 'initial conditions' to consider when studying teachers and teaching at any given moment (Kubanyiova, 2012, p. 192).

In the middle of the figure, and central to the conceptualisation, are teachers' beliefs, which interact with and influence one another, forming a dynamic interactive system, lending support to Zheng's (2013) theorization. On the right side are factors mediating the application of teachers' beliefs, which, according to the findings so far, comprise teachers' perceptions about contextual factors such as exams, time constraints and class size. This mediation process of teachers' perception provides an explanation for the incongruence between teachers' beliefs and practices that has been well identified and discussed by other researchers (e.g. Phipps & Borg, 2009; Zeng 2012; Zheng 2013; Shah, Othman & Senom, 2017). While previous studies have identified similar contextual factors (e.g. Farrell & Bennis, 2013; Li, 2013, Nishino, 2012; Zheng, 2013), the findings of this study highlight the concept of *teachers' perception* about these factors. Teachers varied in their response to similar contextual factors, as influenced by

their initial conditions, which play a vital role in 'shaping' teachers' 'current practices and sense-making processes' (Kubanyiova, 2012, p. 192).

The extent of alignment of teachers' beliefs with learner-centredness, together with teachers' responses and perceptions about contextual factors sheds light on the current status of curriculum reform and the uptake of the learner-centred philosophy by teachers. Nevertheless, as Zheng (2013) argues, due to the high complex and the dynamic nature, teachers' belief systems were 'not easily convertible into predictable, systematic pedagogical action (p. 202). Therefore, to understand teachers and teaching, it is important to gauge teachers' perceptions and letting their voice be heard and shared. Such knowledge about teachers can then inform further decision making about curriculum implementation and professional development programs.

4.8 Chapter summary

This chapter has provided an insight into teachers' beliefs about the aims of English as a foreign language education, the learners and teachers and learner-teacher relationships, learning and teaching, content and resources, and assessment. Some teachers have beliefs that are highly aligned with learner-centredness, such as Anli and Bailin, while others' beliefs are only to a little degree aligned with learner-centredness, such as Fang's. The analysis has identified various factors that influence teacher beliefs. These factors include but are not limited to their general schooling experience, experience as an English learner and user, professional learning and development, past teaching experience, significant others and organizational influences. The overall landscape of a teacher's beliefs might be indicative of their practice. However, it is possible that teachers may believe in one thing and do another, as influenced by their perceptions about contextual factors. Therefore, to fully understand teachers and teaching, as well as the complex relationships between their beliefs and practices, an understanding of teachers' actual practices is essential.

The next four chapters will report on teachers' classroom practices, to unveil how their

beliefs are reflected in practice. Based on the learner-centred conceptualization of L2 classroom teaching (see Section 2.2), Chapter 5 focuses on the analysis of teachers' practices regarding classroom activities and tasks, to provide an overview of the class structures and what exactly happened in the classrooms; Chapter 6 focuses on classroom interactions and the discourse of the classes; Chapter 7 focuses on the four other aspects of classroom teaching, regarding how teachers used content and resources, how students are assessed and evaluated, how teachers facilitate learner thinking and learning strategies, and what kind of learning environment and classroom climate was created. Chapter 8 then synthesizes the findings regarding teacher practices in comparison with the findings regarding teacher beliefs to reveal the alignment of teachers' practice with their beliefs. It also explores factors that influence teachers' practices and change.

Chapter 5 Classroom activities and tasks

Chapter 5 first offers an overview of the classroom settings, locating the classroom in its physical context. Second, it outlines the general features of the lesson structures, identifying the main components of the lessons. Eight components were identified in the observed lessons, namely: 1) revision and conclusion, 2) new words teaching, 3) grammar teaching, 4) teaching of reading comprehension, 5) teaching of listening, 6) oral practices, 7) dealing with exercises and 8) dealing with exam papers. Each lesson may focus on different components. This chapter then analyzes and reports the classroom activities and tasks used by the teachers, using the first six components as organizing themes, while the last two components will be addressed in Chapter 7. This is followed by discussion of the alignment of teachers' practices with learner-centredness, based on the findings.

5.1 Classroom settings and lesson outlines

This section describes the classroom settings and the overall lesson outlines to provide background information about the lessons observed. The classrooms observed were similar with big windows on both sides of the room, two blackboards, one at the front for the teacher to use and the other at the back as a display board usually designed by the students. In terms of multimedia devices, classrooms in Xihua Secondary School had a touch-screen TV at the left front corner, and classrooms in Yizhi Secondary School had a data projector and a slide projector in the front of the classroom and an interactive board in the middle of the front blackboard, which could be covered by the sliding pieces of the blackboard when not used. The class sizes varied, ranging from 37 to 58 students. Some teachers have students sitting in pairs in rows, usually in four big groups (Anli, Guiyun, Fang) while others seat students individually in rows, forming seven or eight lines. Chen's classroom is not typical, as it used to be a lecture hall with a stepped floor and fixed chairs and desks. The students sit in rows of four in the middle

section with one student in a row in the left and right sections of the hall. The overview of the class settings is summarized in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 Overview of the classroom settings

Teacher	Anli	Bailin	Chen	Dongmei	Enya	Fang	Guiyun
Year level	Y8	Y7	Y7	Y9	Y7	Y8	Y9
Class size	56	58	48	53	56	45	37
Seating arrangement	pairs	individual	mixed	individual	individual	pairs	pairs
Multimedia equipment	Touch screen TV	Touch screen TV	Touch screen TV	Touch screen TV	Touch screen TV	Data projector & Smart board	Data projector & Smart board

The 35 lessons observed are typical Chinese EFL classes: prior to the start of the lesson, when the first bell rings, students normally start to read words or texts aloud in chorus. Normally a student is appointed to be in charge of this process. When the teacher comes into the classroom and greets the students in English, the students stand up and respond in English, some classes taking a bow, some not. After the greeting, there might be conversations or activities for authentic use of English, revision of the previous lesson, or simply a dictation of words or sentences studied before.

Of the eight identified components, each lesson may focus on different components. Overall, Anli's and Bailin's were well balanced in attending to all the different components, while the five others spent a great deal of time having students do written exercises, as well as checking answers to exercises and homework. Chen, an extreme example, spent the majority of the 45-minute lesson on exercises and/or homework – 35 minutes of Lesson 1, 40 minutes of Lesson 2; 44 minutes of Lesson 3.

These eight components are not clearly distinct from each other but interrelated or integrated. For example, the revision process may be about grammar points, while

involving oral practice. The main components have been extracted from a whole lesson to make the presentation of the data manageable. Therefore, teachers' practices regarding one component need to be understood in conjunction with other components. The following sections analyze teachers' practices regarding classroom activities and tasks based on the first six themes. The abbreviations and symbols used in the transcripts throughout the data chapters are provided in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2 Abbreviations and symbols used in the transcripts

T	the teacher
STs	the whole class or many students
1ST:	a random student
ST1, ST2 …	the individual students called upon to answer questions
Bb	the blackboard/whiteboard
PPT	projected PowerPoint slide
[]	[Chinese version, translated into English]
()	(explanation)

5.2 Revision and conclusion activities

Four types of activities were used by the teachers to revise the previous lesson and conclude the current lesson. An overview of teachers' use of these activities is provided in Table 5.3. First, teachers normally start revision by asking students to read aloud in chorus some notes, words or texts from the textbook or the projected PowerPoint slides (PPTs). Besides reading aloud, all teachers used grammar-translation questioning activities, some used reflection, recalling and reporting activities, and activities for meaningful communication/practice of the previously learnt knowledge. Detailed explanations of these types of activities are presented in the following subsections.

Table 5.3 Activities for revision and lesson conclusion

Activities for revision and conclusion	Anli	Bailin	Chen	Dongmei	Enya	Fang	Guiyun
Reading aloud in chorus	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Grammar-translation questioning	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y-	Y-
Reflection, recalling and reporting		Y		Y-			Y-
Meaningful communication/practice	Y	Y			Y		

Legend: Y = the type of activities was used by a teacher; Y- = the type of activities was occasionally used by a teacher.

5.2.1 Reading aloud in chorus

Reading aloud in chorus was the most commonly used type of activity for revision and for other parts of teaching. It is an activity when students read aloud the notes, words or text from books or on the projected PowerPoint slides (PPT) or on the smart TV-screen. Given the lack of daily use of English outside the classroom, this activity was regarded as basic, necessary, effective and time efficient to provide an opportunity for students to open their mouths and read aloud, associating the forms with the sounds, practicing appropriate pronunciation. For example, teachers explained that:

> As students lack an environment to learn and practice English (in their daily life), reading aloud is a good way to get familiar with the sound and the words, leaving a deeper impression on the brain. I ask them to frequently read aloud at home, but I cannot guarantee whether they do it properly or not, so in class I let them read aloud frequently, repeating and reviewing the content that has been learnt cyclically, making them familiar with the sentences and words (Anli).
>
> Reading aloud in chorus, the poor students will follow the good ones if they do not know how to pronounce. If you ask them to read individually, some of them may not be able to read or be too shy to read, and you will have to wait and this will waste time (Fang).

Therefore, reading aloud was regarded as an essential activity adopted by all participants not only for revision but also in the other components of teaching.

5.2.2 Grammar-translation activities

Grammar-translation activities were used by five teachers (Anli, Bailin, Chen, Dongmei, Enya) to review the previous lesson and by all seven teachers to summarize a lesson. Teachers either asked students to translate words or sentences, or answer their questions regarding grammar rules and knowledge. For example, after the students read the text in chorus, Enya read the sentences one-by-one in Chinese and asked students to say the English translation (see Excerpt 5.1).

Excerpt 5.1 Enya Y7 L1

T: Now, let's read it once then I speak Chinese, you speak English, Ok?
STS: Ok!
…
T: The first sentence, [my name is Jenny Green. How to say (in English)?]
STS: My name is Jenny Green.
T: [My friend is in China.]
STS: My friend is in China
T: [My telephone is 123.]
…

For another example, Fang asked students to look at the sentences projected on the board and provide an answer to fill out the blanks to complete the sentences according to the questions or according to the Chinese meaning (see Excerpt 5.2).

Excerpt 5.2 Fang Y8 L1

T: [We have studied this grammar point. Now let's have a revision] ok?
STs: Yes!
T: No.1, who? [No.1, who?] Ok, ST3.
ST3: What, we, where did you go on vacation?
T: [Please say it more clearly, the first blank] we [or] where?
ST3& STs: Where
T: [Correct], where did you go on vacation? [Isn't it the key sentence pattern of this unit?]
STs: [Yes!]
T: Ok, good! Sit down please!
T: … [I went to New York City. Pay attention to the] past tense, past tense! Who? Try!
ST4: Let me try.
T: Ok, good!

ST4: I went to New York City.

…

Such grammar-translation questioning facilitated the recall of words and grammar rules.

5.2.3 Reflection, recalling and reporting activities

The reflection, recalling and reporting activities were used by three teachers for revision purposes (Bailin, Guiyun), asking students to reflect on and report what had been taught and by two teachers (Bailin, Dongmei) for summarizing a current lesson. For example, for revision, Guiyun asked students to reflect on the previous lesson and write out interesting or difficult points (see Excerpt 5.3). Nearly every day the students started this process before the bell sounded. When Guiyun arrived at the classroom, some students were writing something on the board and she prompted more students to go and write while the others did it on their own. She then started reviewing the previous lesson based on what had been written on the board.

Excerpt 5.3 Guiyun Y9 L1

T: [While they are writing on the board, what shall we do? We should not keep our hands free, should we? We can do it ourselves, taking out our notebooks or exercise books, choosing and writing down good sentences that you consider good or useful, then check what has been written on the board to see whether I should write them on my notebook as well.]

…

T: [Ok! Now, some time for you to have a look at the sentences on the board, thinking about where they are from.]

…

T: [Ok! Nearly done? Let's appreciate our learning fruits!]

T: [The first sentence] Mooncakes are in the shape of the full moon on the mid-autumn night. [It is a sentence that our classmate found difficult. Ok, what is difficult about this sentence? There is a phrase in it] (underlining the phrase on Bb)
In the shape of

T: What does it mean?

STs: [in the shape of]

T: [Ok, if this question is solved, is the sentence still difficult?]

STs: [No.]

For concluding a lesson, Dongmei asked students to reflect and find what was difficult or important to them and then report to the class, before she emphasized these points

and asked students to take notes (see Excerpt 5.4).

Excerpt 5.4 Dongmei Y9 L1

T: [Look at the dialogue in Section 2D again and tell me later what you find important or difficult.] …
ST6: [Hands up? Anybody?] ST6 please!
T: [I think an important point is] be famous for,
ST6: Very good, be famous for, [what else?]
T: [The second is] both and
ST6: both and
T: [the use of] both and [and] be known for
T: Be known for, can you tell us the use, how to use be famous for? what's the meaning, first,
T& STs: [be famous for]
…
T: Be famous for, [anything else? Any other similar phrases?]
…
T: (ST7 raising hand) ST7.
ST7: [The use of] 'for example' and 'such as'
…

Dongmei showed the notes on the screen for students to take after they had recalled what they had learnt in the lesson or pointed out important or difficult points. Such reflection, recalling and reporting activities were efficient in facilitating active learning and thinking.

5.2.4 Activities for meaningful communication and practice

Activities for meaningful communication and practice were used by Anli, Bailin and Enya in the revision process. Anli and Enya asked questions to the whole class or individual students with pictures on the screen to elicit and review the previous lesson. Enya's class is taken as an example (see Excerpt 5.5).

Excerpt 5.5 Enya Y7 L1

T: Ok, close your books! … Now, look at the screen! [Yesterday we have covered 'Dialogue', right?] Now, who is she? (Pointing to a figure on the screen)
STs: She is Xiao Wanzi
T: Who is she? She is Xiao Wanzi (T writing on Bb). Now, (pointing to another figure on the screen)

STs: He is her grandfather.
T: (Writing 'Who is he' on Bb) ST1, who is he?
ST1: He is her grandfather.
T: He is her grandfather (writing on Bb). Grandfather, ST2, who is she? (pointing to another figure)
ST2: She is her mother.

Rather than asking students to translate the sentences, the revision process engaged students in more meaningful use of language, with scaffolding through teacher questions, pictures and reinforcement through written sentences.

Bailin not only asked students to reflect and report on the previous lesson, but also engaged them in practicing what they had learnt in authentic ways (see Excerpt 5.6). Bailin first set up a task for students to have a conversation in pairs to greet each other and introduce themselves. In preparation for the task, she asked students to recall what expressions they had learnt about greetings.

Excerpt 5.6 Bailin Y7 L1

T: First, let's do revision. [Let's do revision.] (Reading the task requirement on the screen) Make a conversation to introduce yourself and greet people. [Introduce yourself and then greet other people.]
T: [What are the expressions for greetings that we studied yesterday in the three dialogues?]
STs: Nice to meet you.
T: Nice to meet you.
STs: How are you?
…
STs: 'Hi!'
T: 'Hi!' [What else?]
T: [Just now ST1 said] 'What's your name? [Is it an expression for greetings?]
T& No.
STs:
T: … [OK, we have learnt all these expressions for greeting others. Please use these expressions and introduce yourself!] Understand?
STs: Yes!
T: [Work in pairs! Begin!]
…

Rather than asking students to translate sentences, Bailin asked them to recall and report to the class expressions for greeting people. She then facilitated more meaningful and

‘authentic’ use of language by asking the students to make conversations with these expressions. The revision process was goal-directed, as students knew what they were going to do with the phrases, and would attend to the real meaning of the language more than when only saying or translating the sentences or phrases. Students were engaged in active thinking about and reflection on what they had studied. This sentence level learning and recalling was then pushed forward to make practical applications and more meaningful and communicative use of the language.

5.2.5 Summary

Teachers commonly asked students to read in chorus for revision purposes. Besides reading in chorus, three types of activities were used by the teachers for revising the previous lesson and concluding the current lesson. Grammar-translation questioning activities were used by all teachers while the reflection, recalling and reporting activities were used by Dongmei and Guiyun for revision or conclusion and by Bailin for both. Activities for meaningful communication or practice were used by Anli, Bailin and Enya.

Each of the above types of activities has a distinct function. For example, reading aloud in chorus, although seeming to be mechanic drilling, is a moment when everyone would have the courage to read aloud, even the shyest student who would feel unwilling to speak individually in public. The grammar-translation questioning activities facilitate recall of the meaning of words or sentences and grammar knowledge. However, students are relatively passive, only responding to teachers’ questions. The reflection, recalling and reporting activities not only facilitate active thinking but also help reveal what has been taken up by the student or what they find meaningful or challenging. The meaningful communication or practice activities engaged students in using and practicing what had been taught in more authentic, meaningful and relevant ways.

The alignment of teachers’ practices with learner-centredness is mapped out in Table 5.4. Using all the four types of activities, Bailin’s practice is to a great degree

learner-centred. By contrast, only relying on the reading in chorus and the grammar-translation activities, Chen's and Fang's practice are just to a little degree aligned with learner-centred practices. The other four teachers' practices are to some degree learner-centred.

Table 5.4 Alignment of teachers' practices with learner-centredness – Revision and lesson conclusion

Category of Activities and Tasks	Alignment with Learner-centredness			
	Not at all	A little	Some extent	Great extent
Revision & conclusion		C F	A D E G	B

Legend: A – Anli; B – Bailin; C – Chen; D – Dongmei; E – Enya; F – Fang; G – Guiyun

The activities can be used in combination with each other to make the classroom teaching more diverse and interesting, as in Bailin's class, while achieving different purposes and catering for different learning styles. Exclusive use of a certain type, especially reading aloud in chorus, such as practiced by Chen and Fang, limited students' learning and thinking opportunities and the opportunity for the teacher to gauge students' learning states, what they find important, interesting or difficult, what they still remember from the previous lesson or what they are taking home from the current lesson. Such information provides a valuable foundation, according to which teachers design or tailor their teaching to be more responsive to students' perceptions, understandings and prior learning. Teachers cannot presume that what is taught is what is learnt. Only by asking students to reflect, report and/or practice can teachers find out what is actually learnt, what proves difficult or meaningful to students, and what message is taken home by the student. Only with such information can teachers adjust their teaching and teach more responsively to learner needs and learning.

5.3 New words teaching

Five types of activities were used by teachers to teach new words, namely: 1) the teacher telling and explaining; 2) the little teacher activity; 3) translation activities; 4)

activity for authentic use of the words; and 5) reading in chorus (see Table 5.5). The most frequently used activities were the teacher's introducing and explaining the words and then the students' reading the words in chorus. Only Anli and Bailin used other activities too. These activities are explained in detail, except for the reading in chorus activity which has been explained in Section 5.2.1.

Table 5.5 Activities for new words teaching

New words teaching	Anli	Bailin	Chen	Dongmei	Enya	Fang	Guiyun
Teacher introducing and explaining		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Little teacher activity	Y	Y-					
Translation activity	Y						
Authentic use of the words		Y					
Reading in chorus	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Legend: Y= the type of activities was used by a teacher

5.3.1 Teacher telling and explaining the words

All the teachers but Anli used the activity of teacher telling and explaining to introduce new words. Fang's class is taken as an example (see Excerpt 5.7). She was telling and transmitting knowledge to the students, who were expected to know a little about the words. Mostly, only the teacher was talking with few students responses.

Excerpt 5.7 Fang Y8 L3

T: [Ok, today we are going to learn Unit 2. Now please turn to the vocabulary page and we will learn the new words first. Please get your notebook and pen ready, taking notes and underlining when necessary.]

T: [Words of Unit 2! The focus is frequency adverbs.] Housework, [the first one], housework, [Please write beside it] homework. [What kind of nouns are both words] housework, homework? [Uncountable nouns, right? Are they countable or uncountable?]

STs: [Uncountable]

T: [Write] homework [behind it], housework [and] homework, [the work of cleaning and running a house]. On weekends, you will help your mother with housework.

T: Hardly, [note it is a frequency adverb, by a small margin, almost not]. [Note this word] hardly, [many students think it is the adverb of] hard …

For 13 minutes Fang mainly stood at the front talking and telling the students about the words and relevant information, while the students were sitting quietly taking notes, responding to her occasionally.

5.3.2 The little teacher activity

The little teacher activity requiring students to act as little teachers to lead reading and explaining the words was used frequently by Anli and somewhat by Bailin. To do this, the students need to have self-studied the words at home through listening to tapes, and referring to resource books and/or the internet. Anli's class is taken as an example (see Excerpt 5.8), when she asked the 'little teachers' to lead reading of the new words and explain them to the class, sharing information such as how they have come to remember the spelling of the words, what relevant information or important points to emphasize or expand. She asked questions to elicit and scaffold this process.

Excerpt 5.8 Anli Y8 L1

T: Ok, ST4, how do you spell outgoing?
ST4: o-u-t-g-o-i-n-g
T: Very good! [How do you remember this word?]
ST4: [By separating it in to two words] out [and] going.
T: [Ok, are there any combinations of letters in this word?]
ST4: 'ou'
T: 'ou' /au/ [right?] outgoing?
T: Ok, very good! [Class], how to spell outgoing?
STs: o-u-t-g-o-i-n-g
T: Ok, very good, and ST4, [What do you want to emphasize about this word? For example, its synonyms or antonyms, you need to tell others]
ST4: [When we interpret it as friendly, its synonym is] friendly
T: [Good!]
ST4: [When it is interpreted as sociable, its antonym is] shy
T: [The antonym is] shy, [What else?]
T& STs: Quiet
…

Nearly one third of the students had a turn to be the little teacher while others seemed to be listening carefully, taking notes and responding to the teacher's questions. The little

teachers explained most of the important or relevant points concerning the new words, so Anli acted as a facilitator, engaging the class and reinforcing what the little teachers had said, making explanations or additions when necessary. This activity demonstrated how much student involvement, contribution and thinking was facilitated. Anli said that she got this idea through reflecting on her practice and exploring ways to engage students in active learning. She wished to develop students' potential and ability and give them opportunities to demonstrate these.

Although Anli and Bailin both used this activity, Anli involved students in leading reading and explaining the new words, while Bailin only involved students in leading and reading the new words. Bailin explained that it was the beginning of the semester and the students were new, so she needed to gradually cultivate their learning habits and develop their ability to do so.

5.3.3 Translation activity and authentic use of the words

The translation activity was only used by Anli to reinforce the newly taught words. She challenged students to translate the words shown on the screen one-by-one or group-by-group, while the class watched and later evaluated how well they had done. Authentic use of the words is only used by Bailin to reinforce the newly learnt words. Excerpt 5.9 is an example of Bailin's practice.

Excerpt 5.9 Bailin Y7 L4

T: Now, look at the screen! Let's go on. Let's do some exercises. How many birds are there in the picture? [What's the Chinese meaning of this question, do you know?]
…
T: Now, work out the math problems: [We will answer some maths questions.] What's 0 and 4?
STs: Four.
T: Ok, very good! Four. [0 and 4 is] (Screen showing 0 + 4 = 4)
STs: Four.
T: [Good! Please remember how to say the symbol '+'?]
STs: And.
T: [OK, continue.] (Screen showing 5 + 1 =)
…

T: [My question is how turn it into a question. Read it out to me!]
STs: What's five and one?
…
T: [Excellent! Learning so quickly! Are you clear now?]
…
T: [Next,] bike number. [Bike number, right? Many of you come to school by bike. When we say it, we say the word 'bike' first.] bike,
…
T: [Next, I drive a car, right?] What's my car number?
STs: [Don't know.]
T: [Yi, how to say car numbers? How to say this?] (PPT showing T's car number)
…

Compared with the common practice of exclusively asking students to read in chorus, Anli and Bailin reinforced the newly learnt words. In this example, Bailin's practice made the learning more meaningful and the use of English more authentic.

5.3.4 Summary

The most commonly used activity for teaching new words was the teacher telling and explaining activity, followed by reading in chorus. Anli mainly and Bailin partly involved students in the teaching of the new words, and they used other activities to reinforce the newly learnt words besides reading in chorus. The degree to which the teachers' practices are aligned with learner-centredness is mapped out in Table 5.6.

Table 5.6 Alignment of teachers' practices with learner-centredness – New words teaching

Category of activities and Tasks	Alignment with learner-centredness			
	Not at all	A little	Some extent	Great extent
New words teaching	C D E F G			A B

Legend: A – Anli; B – Bailin; C – Chen; D – Dongmei; E – Enya; F – Fang; G – Guiyun

Anli's and Bailin's practices are to a great extent learner-centred. Their use of the little teacher activity not only gives the students talking time, but also allows the sharing of knowledge the students have gained through self-study at home to the class. It effectively engaged students in actively thinking, telling, and learning, while the teacher

only acted as a facilitator scaffolding the learning process. Besides reading in chorus, Anli engaged students in translation activities and Bailin engaged students in authentic use of the words. Their practice demonstrated how learning can be made more relevant, meaningful and useful to students. In contrast, the other teachers' practices were not at all learner-centred. Most of the time they acted as an 'omniscient dominating' dominating the class talking time while the students were like 'empty jugs' waiting passively to be filled with the teacher's knowledge, taking notes and responding occasionally. For example, in Fang's class, the students were receiving a great amount of information that was passed onto them without appropriate scaffolding and interaction to facilitate the internalization. To facilitate the internalization of the new words, these teachers only asked students to read in chorus, whereas from a learner-centred perspective using this basic and mechanical practicing alone cannot satisfy the needs of reinforcing the new words.

5.4 Grammar teaching

Two approaches to teaching grammar rules were identified: a deductive approach and an inductive approach. Six teachers used a deductive approach, introducing the grammar rules directly then providing examples to illustrate the rules. Anli took an inductive approach to teach grammar and only elicited and summarized the rules after having used many examples to facilitate noticing and practice of the rules. Whichever approach the teacher took, a common activity was to reinforce the rules with grammar-translation exercise activities. Some also used activities to engage students in practicing and applying the rules in meaningful and authentic ways. The activities teachers used are summarized in Table 5.7, followed by detailed explanations.

Table 5.7 Activities for grammar teaching

Activities for grammar teaching	Anli	Bailin	Chen	Dongmei	Enya	Fang	Guiyun
Foregrounding grammar concepts	Y						
Facilitating notice with plenty of examples and practice	Y						
Introducing grammar rules directly		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Grammar-translation activities	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Practice and apply in authentic ways	Y	Y	Y				

Legend: Y= the type of activities was used by a teacher

5.4.1 Foregrounding grammar concepts

Activities foregrounding grammar concepts were used by Anli to prepare students for the learning of new grammar points in a natural way. For example, to prepare students for the concept of comparative degree Anli created a real situation when she was doing an activity to reinforce the newly learnt words (See Excerpt 5.10). Anli wrote 'Group 1' 'Group 2', 'Group 3' and 'Group 4' on the blackboard, each standing for the four groups of students according to their seating arrangement. Next, she read the words on the screen aloud for Group 1 to translate, then in the end she wrote 'well' on the blackboard for Group 1, which meant Group 1 did well. Then Group 2 stood up, did the same thing, and achieved a 'better' for their group. Group 3 and 4 performed a different activity by continuing to say the Chinese meaning of the words within three seconds, one by one, row by row. Then the teacher asked the students to judge which group performed better, and they responded Group 4 did well, Group 3 did better. Then the teacher wrote on the blackboard 'good' and 'better' for Groups 4 and 3 respectively. Then the conversation goes:

Excerpt 5.10 Anli Y8 L2

T: [We should say that when we compare Group Three and Four, we discover] Group 3 did well. Group 4 did better. (T writing 'well' and 'better' on Bb below 'Group 3' and 'Group 4'.)

T: [Ok, if we compare all of the groups, we will discover] Group 3 did

T& STs: as well as Group 1
T: [How do they compare?]
T& STs: [as well as]
T: and Group. 2 and Group. 4, [How do they compare?]
T& STs: Group 4 did as well as Group 2
T: [Ah, this is something we are going to learn tomorrow. Today we only need to know about it.]

Anli embedded a valuable opportunity into the new-words-reinforcing activity, creating an authentic situation to introduce the concept of comparative degree. English is used for authentic purposes to compare the performance of different groups. Meanwhile, the grammar concept is introduced in a natural way.

5.4.2 Facilitating noticing

Activities facilitating noticing were used by Anli only. In the teaching of comparative degree of adjectives and adverbs, Anli (see Excerpt 5.11) showed a large number of pictures on the screen, each containing two people with strikingly contrasting characteristics, such as height, weight and age. Then she asked the students to observe and notice, practice with plenty of examples to say sentences and then in pairs to use comparative degree to describe the people in each picture.

Excerpt 5.11 Anli Y8 L2

T: Mrs Black is. . .
STs: tall (looking at PPT)
T: Mr Black is
STs: Taller
T: [Ok, follow me,] tall,
STs: Tall,
T: Taller
STs: Taller
T: How to translate the meaning, tall
STs: Gao
T: Taller
STs: Geng gao
T: Very good, [come on, in full sentence.] Mrs Black ready, go
STs: Mrs Black is tall, Mr Black is taller,
T: [Good, again, how can we put this into a sentence?]
STs: Mr Black is taller than Mrs Black.

T: What's the meaning?
STs: Black Xian sheng bi Black fu ren gao.
…
T: [Ok, some more] this is Kate, this is David. [What can we say?] Kate is young. David is
STs: younger
T: [Wo, you are so clever, already find the rules.]
…

The screen showed the words and sentences simultaneously, highlighting the differences of the adjectives and their respective comparative degree. This process enabled students to look, observe, notice, listen, think, discuss and speak at the same time, aiming for students to discover or infer the grammar rules in the process.

On the next day, Anli continued this activity. The pictures were more interesting and vivid, with popular figures in TV or cartoons, famous actors or sports players, which were more relevant to students' lives. With their striking comparisons, these pictures amused the students. With Anli's facilitation and scaffolding, the students gradually became independent by producing complete sentences and grasping the grammar rules while using them authentically.

5.4.3 Directly introducing the rules

Direct introducing of the grammar rules with examples was used by all teachers except Anli. Dongmei's teaching of passive voice is taken as an example (see Excerpt 5.12). After revision of the structures of passive voice with questions, Dongmei introduced the rules regarding how to change an active to a passive sentence directly.

Excerpt 5.12 Dongmei Y9 L3

T: [Then how to change sentences from active voice to passive voice? Very easy! Ok, let's have a look! For example,] many people speak English, [this is the subject: many people speak English. Very easy! … Many people speak English, that is English is]
T& STs: Is spoken by many people
T: [That is to say, when we describe, we say we pick out the object of the active sentence, making the object of the active sentence] 'English'

T& STs: [the subject]

T: [of the passive voice sentence. Then the verb, we use verb 'be' and the past participle of the verb. Then we use 'by' to link the original subject, by what, you all know …]

After directly introducing the rules, teachers generally reinforced the rules using grammar-translation activities.

5.4.4 Grammar-translation activities

Grammar-translation activities were used by all teachers to reinforce the grammar rules. For example, Dongmei used the screen to show some sentences for the students to change into passive voice immediately (Excerpt 5.13).

Excerpt 5.13 Dongmei Y9 L3

T: [Now, let's look at these sentences. I will ask students to stand up and answer, Ok?] People play football all over the world. [The sentence means that people all over the world play football. Ok, who can? … Ok, good, please!] (pointing to ST3 who is raising her hand)

ST3: People is, [Oh, no!] football is played by people all over the world.

T: [Let's see whether he is correct.]

T& STs: Football is played by people all over the world.

T: [But why did he use is rather than was?]

STs: inaudible

T: [Because the active voice of this sentence is]

STs: [the simple present tense]

T: … No. 2 An old man on TV tells a story every Sunday. [How to change this sentence?]

…

Dongmei then asked students to do written exercises from the textbook and then practice in the exercise book to reinforce the grammar rules.

5.4.5 Practice and application in authentic ways

Activities facilitating practice and application of the grammar rules in authentic ways were used by Anli, Bailin and Chen to facilitate the learning or reinforce the rules. For example, to continue practicing the comparative degree, Anli invited two students to come to the front to be models for the whole class to compare, using what they had just

learnt. She first guided the students to compare from different aspects (see Excerpt 5.14).

Excerpt 5.14 Anli Y8 L3

T: Ok, try, [how can we compare these two, from what aspects, think about it] (T raising hand)
STs: [tall]
T: [tall]
STs: [short]
T: [Short], ok, [tall and short, what else?]
STs: Funny
T: Funny, [what else?]
…
T: [Ok, ST1, say a sentence]
ST1: En, A is taller than B
T: Ok, very good, [what about the other way round? ST2]
ST2: B is shorter than A
T: Very good, [what else, what else? ST3]
ST3: A is funnier than B
…
ST5: A's hair
T: A's hair is
ST5: is longer than B's (T is doing action, pointing to A's hair, and showing the difference)
T: than B's hair
T: Very good, (T and the class applauded) [we can also say that B has longer hair than A, how to say?]
STs: B has longer hair than A (T is like a conductor to an orchestra)
T: Very good! (T and the class applauded) [Wonderful, thanks to the two students!]

Rather than purely focusing on pattern drills and repetition, this activity made the application and learning of the language authentic and meaningful. The class looked happy, and the atmosphere was conducive to learning. Anli practiced what she believed, that is what is learnt should be applied in authentic ways and learning should be made meaningful and relevant to students by teachers developing students' communication and use of English.

Taking Bailin's class as another example, Bailin asked questions to facilitate authentic

use of the rules regarding changing sentences with the verb ‘be’ into general questions (see Excerpt 5.15).

Excerpt 5.15 Bailin Y7 L3

T: [Ok, be quick! Let me see who has finished taking the notes.] (some STs raising hands) [Almost done. I can start asking questions to those who have finished and the others keep on taking down the notes. I will ask ST1 first.] ST1, are you ST1?
ST1: Yes I am.
T: Very good, sit down, please! ST2, are you ST3?
ST2: No, I am not.
T: Ok, very good, sit down, please! ST4, Is he ST5? (T pointing to ST5)
ST4: Yes, he is.
T: Ok, very good, sit down, please! Ok, ST6, Is he ST7? (T pointing to ST7)
…
T: ST13, is this your book? (pointing to a book)
ST13: No, it isn’t.
…

In this way, learning English is not only to know about the rules, but also to develop the ability to use the rules in meaningful and authentic ways.

Similarly, Chen used real objects to facilitate the teaching and reinforcing of possessive pronouns (see Excerpt 5.16).

Excerpt 5.16 Chen Y7 L3

T: (T reading the notes on PPT) [To show the possessive relationship of a person or a living being, we add to the end of a singular noun an]
STs: S
T: Ok, [for singular nouns we add ‘’s’. What about plural nouns? We add ‘ ’ ’ only. For example,] for example …
T: Whose pen is it? [Whose is this pen?]
STs: ST1’s
T: OK, we can say his pen or ST1’s pen. [Then, what do we add at the end of ST1? ‘ ’s ‘ …]
STs: It’s a book
T: Ok, it’s an English book. Ok, whose book is it?
STs: ST2’s
T: [What to add to ST2?]
STs: ’s
T: (T pointing to a desk) … Whose desk is it? [Whose desk?]
STs: It’s ST3 and ST4’s

T: [Ok, two students sharing this desk.] It's
STs: ST3 and ST4's
T: [Then what do we add to 'ST2?]
STs: 's
…

In this way, the learning of the possessive pronouns was made meaningful, relevant and applicable/accessible to students, rather than abstract.

5.4.6 Summary

Anli is the only teacher who used an inductive approach to teaching grammar rules. She introduced the grammar concepts to prepare students well in advance and then used plenty of examples to facilitate noticing and authentic use of the language before eliciting and summarizing the rules. All the other six teachers took a deductive approach to teaching grammar, introducing the rules directly to students and then reinforcing the rules with some grammar-translation exercises. Among them, Bailin and Chen also used activities to facilitate authentic use and practice of the rules. The degree to which the teachers' practices are aligned with learner-centred practice is provided in Table 5.8.

Table 5.8 Alignment of teachers' practice with learner-centredness – Grammar teaching

Category of activities and tasks	**Alignment with learner-centredness**			
	Not at all	A little	Some extent	Great extent
Grammar teaching		D E F G	B C	A

Legend: A – Anli; B – Bailin; C – Chen; D – Dongmei; E – Enya; F – Fang; G – Guiyun

Anli's practice is to a great extent aligned with learner-centred practices. She introduced and reinforced the grammar concept to be taught in a natural and authentic way. Grammar rules were mainly learnt by the students through previewing, practicing orally, summarizing and taking notes. In this way, the opportunity for noticing, thinking, discussing and practicing the rules was optimized. In contrast, the ways Dongmei, Enya, Fang and Guiyun taught grammar were only to a little degree learner-centred. By directly introducing the rules and then reinforcing them with some grammar-translation

activities, they did not provide opportunities for students to discuss, negotiate and deepen their understanding, nor did they use activities to engage students in authentic use of the language or make the learning meaningful and relevant to students. Bailin and Chen were in between, with their practices to some degree learner-centred as they engaged students in meaningful and authentic use of the language.

Regarding whether a deductive approach or an inductive approach is more effective, no clear-cut evidence supports the claim either way and the literature suggests that both can be effective, depending on the purpose and context of teaching (Thornbury, 1999; Brown, 2007). The findings indicate that the difference lies in whether inductive teachers foregrounded the grammar concepts well in advance to prepare students, whether they used plenty of examples and practices to facilitate the noticing, and whether they used activities to facilitate practice and application of the rules in authentic ways.

5.5 Teaching of reading comprehension

Teaching of reading comprehension was observed in four teachers' classes. The other three teachers – Chen, Enya and Bailin – did not spend much time on reading comprehension, possibly due to the fact that they were all teaching Year 7 classes and the textbook reading activities were mainly such activities as matching pictures with words. The reading activities – categorized into pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading activities – used by the other four teachers are outlined in Table 5.9.

Table 5.9 Activities for teaching reading

Activities for teaching reading	Anli	Dongmei	Fang	Guiyun
Pre-reading				
Questioning and discussing about the topic		Y		
Guessing the gist	Y	Y		
Introducing places			Y	
While reading				
Scanning for gist	Y	Y		
Searching for answers	Y	Y	Y	Y
Underlining important or difficult phrases and words			Y	Y
Post-reading				
Discussing answers and sharing of important points with peers	Y-	Y		
Explaining using Grammar-translation approach			Y	Y

Legend: Y = the type of activities was used by a teacher; Y- = the type of activities was used by a teacher infrequently

Overall, Anli and Dongmei used activities to engage students in active thinking and discussion before reading and reflection and discussion after reading, emphasizing more on skill and strategy development. In comparison, Fang and Guiyun mainly used a grammar-translation approach to explain the passages.

5.5.1 Pre-reading activities

Prior to reading the passage, teachers used activities to prepare students for reading. The activities were: questioning and discussion about the topic (Anli, Dongmei), guessing the gist according to the title (Anli, Dongmei), introducing places that will appear in the reading passage (Fang), and previewing and noting down important and difficult points at home. For example, Dongmei asked questions that were relevant to the topic of the passage to lead to the passage (see Excerpt 5.17).

Excerpt 5.17 Dongmei Y9 L2

T: Do you like travelling?

…

T: If you like travelling, please hands up! …
T: ST1, how about you? Don't you like travelling?
ST1: Er, yes,
T: Why?
…
T: ST4, what's your favourite country?
ST4: Er, Germany
…
T: Germany, if you have a chance to go to Germany, what would you like to buy?
ST4: I will buy some (inaudible). If I could I will buy a soccer ball.
…
T: Ok, now, as we know that there are so many things made in China, Switzerland, France, and what about in America and other countries in the world? …

Dongmei engaged students in meaningful discussion and authentic use of English, making learning relevant to students' lives and making them think for themselves, so as to lead in to the reading text. Afterwards, she asked questions to facilitate noticing, discussion and guessing the gist according to the title and the pictures (see Excerpt 5.18)

Excerpt 5.18 Dongmei Y9 L2

T: Let's read the passage of 3A, first, before you read, please look at the photo, the questions in 3A and the title to the story on page 35, then answer the questions. First, what can you see in the photo? [What can you see in the photo?]
STs: American flag
T: T& A flag, An
STs: American flag
T: That's right, [an American flag], and what other things can you see? What special things can you see?
STs: Made in China
T: Yes, the flag on a piece of cloth writing …
T& STs: Made in China.
T: That's right, and what may the passage talk about? [What may the passage talk about? Please scan quickly and guess.] Now, look at the title. [What is the] title? The difficult search for American products in the US. What's the meaning? What's the Chinese meaning?
…
T: ST3, how about you? Please! What may the passage talk about?
ST3: I think it talks about American products.
T: Yes, Ok, good, sit down, please. American products. ST4, what's your opinion?
ST4: I think it talks about it is difficult to find American products in America.

Similarly, Anli used questions to arouse students' interest and curiosity, relating the

passage to the students and facilitating the guessing of main ideas in the class's passage. In comparison, although Fang prepared the students by introducing the names of places that would appear in the passage with a map of Malaysia, she did not ask questions to engage students with the texts, and thus, did not make learning relevant or interesting to students as did Dongmei and Anli. Instead, she quickly moved on and asked students to read the passage on their own to find answers to the questions listed in the textbook, meanwhile underlining important or difficult points. Guiyun asked students to preview the passage at home, noting down anything they found difficult or liked. Thus, reading comprehension was mainly used as text to facilitate the learning of grammar knowledge and words or phrases.

5.5.2 While-reading activities

During while-reading, Anli and Dongmei asked students to scan for the gist and search for answers. Anli's class is taken as an example (see Excerpt 5.19).

Excerpt 5.19 Anli Y8 L1

T: [Ok, now read the passage quickly to get the general meaning, two minutes, begin!]

…

T: [Ok, please raise your hand if you have finished reading once … Now think about my question:] How many questions are mentioned in this passage? …

STs: Three.

T: Ah, three. Which questions, which questions? [Which questions are surveyed? … ok,] ST2 (raising hand),

ST2: Exercises, use the internet, and watch TV.

T: [Excellent, where did you find the answers?]

STs& ST2: [in the first paragraph]

…

T: [Please read paragraph 1 and 2 and find the answers to the following questions, what are the results?] How many per cent of the students did not exercise at school? … [ok, you have found the answers, be quick, ST3]

ST3: 20 per cent of them do not exercise at all.

T: Oh, [where did you find it?]

…

T: [Ah, they do not exercise! Let's move on,] How many per cent of the students exercises every day?

…

This process of scanning for the gist and then searching for answers to specific questions engaged students in active reading, thinking and searching for answers. It also facilitated the development of students' reading skills and strategies. In comparison, although Fang and Guiyun also asked students to search for answers, the time allowed was short. Thus it was just a step that the teacher announced rather than a real learning and reading process. By asking students to underline important or difficult phrases while reading, Fang and Guiyun directed students' attention to important or difficult grammar points or phrases, rather than developing students' reading strategies and abilities.

5.5.3 Post-reading activities

Two types of post-reading activities were identified: peer discussion activity (Anli, Dongmei) and grammar-translation activity (Fang, Guiyun). For example, Anli asked students to discuss the answers to some questions which seemed to be a bit challenging (see Excerpt 5.20).

Excerpt 5.20 Anli Y8 L1

T: [Ok, now, next paragraph, lets answer the question together, maybe it is hard for you to find the answer. Ah, we need to have a discussion:] Do you think that students in Xihua High School are healthy? [Are the students in this school healthy?]
STs: [Not healthy]
T: Why or Why not? [Come on, discuss in groups of four]
…
T: [Ok, let's see what result has Group One come up with]
ST1: We, We think the students in Xihua High School are not healthy
T: Oh, (they) are not healthy, why?
ST1: Oh, because, er, they
T: they exercise
ST1: they exercise
T: They sometimes exercise, [how often do they exercise?]
STs: [hardly]
T: They hardly ever (do exercise). They always use the internet. They often watch TV.
T: [Do you agree?]

STs: Yes,
T: [Do you all agree? Is it talking about you?]
STs: No

Dongmei used peer discussion not only for students to check answers but also to share what they found difficult or important before reporting to the class (see Excerpt 5.21)

Excerpt 5.21 Dongmei Y9 L2

T: Ok, now, please discuss in groups what needs to be emphasized or what you still do not understand. Whoever stands up to report will gain one point for your group
…
T: [Ok, an opportunity for ST1's group. What would you like to tell us?] Please.
…
ST1: Er, he thinks that it is interesting that so many products in the local shops were made in China.
T: What do you think is important? What do you get?
ST1: [I think that]
T: [Do you think it is] important [or] difficult?
ST1: D Difficult
T: [Then?]
ST1: [I do not understand.]
T: [You do not understand. Can you translate? Do you understand?]
ST1: [No, I can't.]
T: Do you know the Chinese meaning?
ST1: No
T: No, Ok, sit down please. ST2 please tell us the Chinese meaning. [What is the Chinese meaning of this sentence?]
…

Dongmei did not focus much on the grammar points in the passage but mainly on the ability and skill development of the students.

By contrast, Fang and Guiyun mainly used grammar-translation and explanation activities. After students read quickly and underlined some important phrases, they translated and explained the passage sentence by sentence, pointing out the grammar and important phrases for students to take notes. Fang's class is taken as an example (see Excerpt 5.22).

Excerpt 5.22 Fang Y8 L2

T: [Ok] No. 1. [You've read paragraph 1, I will ask] Did Jane have a good time on Monday?
STs: Yes, she. . .
T: Yes or no?
STs: Yes
1ST: He did
T: She, yes, she did.
T: What about on Tuesday?
1ST: It's terrible
T: On Tuesday [did he still] have a good time?
STs: No, it was terrible.
T: She didn't have a good time on Tuesday. [Ok, write it down! Then why did not she] have a good time? [Why she had a good time on Monday? Let's have a look. Ok, notebooks ready! Number the notes to see how many notes we have. We need to copy the notes after class, so make sure you have enough. Where are your notebooks?]
…
T: Mark the date and numbers. …
T: I arrived in [what is the tense used in a recount? Think about it.]
STs: [Past tense]
T: [Pay attention to the past tense, as the focus of this unit is]
STs: [past tense]
T: I arrived in Penang in Malaysia this morning with my family. [Tell me what you have noted just now while reading it. What mark did you use?]
STs: with, with
T: With [mark it with a triangle. Correct! It is a preposition, together with someone. What else? That's all?]
STs: With. . .
T: [Are there any phrases in it?]
…

By mainly using grammar-translation and explanation activities, the focus of Fang and Guiyun was to facilitate noticing of the phrases that are likely to appear in exams by pointing out and asking students to take notes.

5.5.4 Summary

Three kinds of pre-reading activities were identified: questioning and discussing features and/or aspects of the topic of the passage (Dongmei), guessing the gist of the passage activity (Anli, Dongmei), and introducing names of places that will appear in

the passage (Fang). While-reading activities were: scanning for the gist (Anli, Dongmei), searching for answers (all), and underlining important or difficult phrases (Fang, Guiyun). Post-reading activities were: peer discussion about challenging questions or difficult points (Anli, Dongmei) and grammar-translation explanation (Fang, Guiyun).

The degree to which teachers' practices are aligned with learner-centred practice is outlined in Table 5.10. Anli's and Dongmei's practices are to a great extent aligned with learner-centred practices. They both paid attention to the development of reading skills and ability, constantly asking questions to engage the students with the texts and active learning. The learning process was well-scaffolded, interesting and relevant to students, who were observed to be engaged. Their use of peer discussion of answers and sharing of important or difficult points facilitated students' interaction and reflection, expanded learning and thinking opportunities, and provided more time for contemplation and negotiation of meaning.

Table 5.10 Alignment of teachers' practices with learner-centredness – Teaching of reading

Category of activities and tasks	**Alignment with learner-centredness**			
	Not at all	A little	Some extent	Great extent
Teaching of reading		F G		AD

Legend: A – Anli; D – Dongmei; F – Fang; G – Guiyun

By contrast, Fang's and Guiyun's practice were just to a little degree aligned with learner-centred practices. They mainly focused on the learning of grammar points, words or phrases, rather than developing students reading strategies and skills. The passage is detached from the students and is treated as media for students to learn about grammar points. Fang used a map of Malaysia to indicate the location of places; however, she did not expand students' knowledge by providing or eliciting some information about Malaysia, relating it to China and students' lives. Guiyun asked students to preview the passage, note down difficult or interesting points to write on the blackboard at the beginning of the next class. However, she did not engage students in

discussion about the topic or content of the passage. Nor did she ask students to share what they had underlined as important or difficult.

5.6 Listening comprehension

In dealing with listening comprehension, teachers commonly explained the questions first and then had the students listen and answer questions. After checking the answers, students were normally asked to read in chorus after the audio recording sentence by sentence, or to read on their own, in pairs or in groups. Finally, the transcript was translated or explained, mainly by the teacher or through questioning and answering between the teacher and the students. Two teachers used activities prior to this common process, facilitating discussion and authentic use of English. After listening and checking answers, Anli was the only teacher who asked students to reflect and tell what they still do not understand in the transcript. Table 5.11 provides an overview of the activities for all teachers, followed by examples of Anli's and Dongmei's classes.

Table 5.11 Activities for teaching listening

Activities for teaching listening	Anli	Bailin	Chen	Dongmei	Enya	Fang	Guiyun
Pre-listening activities							
• Activities facilitating discussion and noticing	Y			Y			
• Teacher explaining questions	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Post-listening activities							
• Answers checking	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
• Reading in chorus the transcript	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
• Grammar-translation explanation of the transcript	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
• Students reflection and asking questions	Y						

Legend: Y= the type of activities was used by a teacher

5.6.1 Pre-listening activities

Prior to the listening task, all teachers pointed out and explained the question to be answered. Before that, Anli and Dongmei also used activities to facilitate discussion and noticing of the topics or pictures related to the listening tasks. For example, Anli asked students to observe the pictures and tell what they saw (Excerpt 5.23).

Excerpt 5.23 Anli L3

T: Ok, very good! [Next, Could you please] look at the picture carefully! What can you see in the picture? …
STs: Many students.
T: Many students, six students, right?
STS: Yes,
T: [What characteristics did you notice?]
STs: [musical instruments]
T: [Ah, yes, they are all playing a musical instrument. What about their appearance? How do they look?]
STs: [Look alike. Twins!]
T: [Oh, they look alike. They are twins. Excellent! … Who are they?] Tera and
STs: Tina
…
T: Then, do they look different in any ways?]
STs: [Yes]
T: [Although they are twins, there are still some differences. Ok, I am going to ask questions. First of all, observe!] Who is taller, Tina or Tera?
STs: Tina,
T: Yes, Tina is
STs: taller
T: Yes, next, who is heavier, Peter or Paul?
…

Anli's practice facilitated the students' noticing and discovering about the pictures related to the listening tasks. The listening activity was well scaffolded and the pictures were used effectively as a resource for input and discussion. Dongmei also made a similar effort (see Excerpt 5.24).

Excerpt 5.24 Dongmei Y9 L1

T: Ok, please listen to me and answer my question. Who invented paper? That's to say, whom was paper invented by?
STs: [Cai Lun].

T: [Cai Lun], that's right, and who invented tea?

…

T: [Shen Nong], that's right! [Shen Nong] right? Whom was tea invented by? By whom?

…

T: Do you like drinking tea?

STs: yes/no

T: [If] yes, please hands up.

T: Ok, so many students like drinking tea, why do you like drinking tea? ST1, please!

ST1: Oh, because tea is, taste delicious

T: Tastes delicious? Ok, good, How about you ST2?

…

T: Ok, now this morning we are going to learn Section 2D … First, we will listen to the dialogue …

Dongmei asked questions relevant to the topic to engage students in meaningful practice of the passive voice and authentic discussion about tea. This process is also designed to prepare the students for the listening task that she added as an extra activity to the text.

5.6.2 Post-listening activities

After students had listened to the audio recordings, they answered the questions, teachers checked their answers, asked students to repeat sentence by sentence following the audio recordings or read the transcript in chorus. This was then followed by teachers' grammar-translation explanation of the transcript. Having students reflect and ask questions about the transcript is an activity only identified in Anli's class. Excerpt 5.25 illustrates this activity facilitated by Anli.

Excerpt 5.25 Anli Y8 L1

T: [You have read twice. Is there anything that you do not understand in this dialogue? Have a look quickly and tell me … Ok, ST1 please!]

ST1: I can't stand milk!

T: Yes, Yes, [I also want to know its meaning. The other students, have you found it]?

STs: Yes.

T: I can't stand milk. I rarely drink milk. What's the Chinese meaning? [Ok, let's ask ST2 to tell us the meaning.] I can't stand milk.

ST2: [I can't stand the taste of milk.]

T: [I can't stand the taste of milk. How did you know the meaning, ST2?]

…

T: Anyone? Anyone? [Any other questions? Any other sentences you do not know?]

Anli asked students to think and report anything they did not understand about the transcript. By giving students time to reflect and report, and then asking other students to explain, Anli facilitated active thinking, noticing and learning.

5.6.3 Summary

The common practice in dealing with listening comprehension tasks follows these steps: pointing students to the questions with explanations; students listening and answering questions; the teacher checking the answers; asking students to read the transcript; and then the teacher doing grammar-translation explanations of the transcript. The five teachers other than Anli and Bailin limited their practices to these steps, which were mainly grammar-translation focused. The alignment of teachers' practices with learner-centred practices is summarized in Table 5.12.

Table 5.12 Alignment of teachers' practices with learner-centredness – Listening comprehension

Category of activities and tasks	**Alignment with learner-centredness**			
	Not at all	A little	Some extent	Great extent
Listening comprehension		C D E F G		A B

Legend: A – Anli; B – Bailin; C – Chen; D – Dongmei; E – Enya; F – Fang; G – Guiyun

The practices of Chen, Dongmei, Enya, Fang and Guiyun are to a little degree learner-centred, given that they pointed students to the questions and asked them to listen for the key words based on the questions. In comparison, Anli's and Dongmei's practices are to a great extent aligned with learner-centred practices. Beyond these common steps, they used activities to facilitate discussion and noticing about topics or pictures related to the listening tasks. Their practice facilitated the overall development of the students' language ability, maximized the opportunity for students to think, notice, discuss and practice the language they had just learnt. Anli also asked the students to reflect and tell what they did not understand about the transcript. Her practice facilitated active learning, thinking and reflection, student-initiated questioning. She provided time

for students to think for themselves and report, so as to tailor teaching accordingly. Thus, learning and teaching was made more purposeful and more responsive to learners' needs and understanding.

5.7 Speaking and communication

Four types of speaking and communication activities were identified. These were: authentic questioning, oral presentation, whole class speaking activity and pair/group speaking activities. Teachers' use of these categories varied as summarized in Table 5.13. In general, Anli and Bailin used such activities more than others, while Guiyun used them least of all. A detailed explanation is provided in this section.

Table 5.13 Speaking and communication activities

Activities for oral practices	Anli	Bailin	Chen	Dongmei	Enya	Fang	Guiyun
Authentic questioning	Y	Y	Y-	Y	Y-	Y-	
Oral presentation	Y			Y	Y-		
Whole class activity	Y	Y	Y		Y		
Pair and group activity	Y	Y	Y-		Y-	Y-	Y-

Legend: Y= the type of activities was used by a teacher; Y-= the type of activities was used by a teacher occasionally

5.7.1 Authentic questioning

Answering authentic questions is an activity frequently used by Anli (e.g. Excerpts 5.10 & 11) and Bailin (e.g. Excerpt 5.9), occasionally used by other teachers, but never used by Guiyun. Excerpt 5.26 is an example of Enya's class when she asked the students questions based on some pictures on the screen.

Excerpt 5.26 Enya Y7 L2

T: Ok, stop here, there is a question, I need your help me. [You all said just now] he is my father, he is my mother, they are my grandparents, [but in reality, are they really your] brother, mother?

STs: [No.]

T: [Then whose family members are these people?] Her, Cindy's, yes or no? Cindy's, so they are asking you questions like this. ST1, stand up. Who is A? Who is A? He is [whose father]? He is Cindy's father. Cindy's father, [right]? Cindy, [his or her]?

STs: [her]
T: [He is her father], how to say?
STs: He is …
T: [Whose father]?
T& STs: He is her father
T: [Change the person, change the person, change into] her. [What if he is a boy's father?]
STs: his,
T: [What if it is a boy?]
STs: His
T: [Good], sit down! Sit down! [I am going to ask questions. I will ask questions continuously]. ST2, Who is D? Who is D? [Everybody listen and look]. Who is D?
ST2: She is her mother.
T: She is her mother. Her [refers to]?
STs: Cindy,
T: ST3, Who are A and D?
…

Such activities engaged the students in meaningful and contextualized communication about themselves, their peers, or pictures.

5.7.2 Oral presentation

Students' oral presentation activity was used routinely by Anli and Dongmei, who both used an activity called 'Class Sharing'. Every day at the beginning of the class, one student or one group of students would go to the front to give an oral presentation of various forms, trying to apply into the presentation what they had learnt. Taking Anli's class as an example, on the first day, one boy went to the front of the classroom and gave a speech about his eating habits, while the others listened attentively. Afterwards, Anli asked the other students to think and give feedback and the students gave the boy very specific and useful comments, such as [I think he should not refer to his draft], [He should speak more loudly], [He could have pronounced more clearly], and [He should speak with emotion]. At last, Anli asked the whole class to give a grade to the boy.

The next day, Anli invited three students from another class to perform a roleplay. One of them acted as an interviewer interviewing the other two about habits and manners, which was the topic of the unit that students were then studying. They used PPT to aid

the presentation, after which the teacher asked questions to check students' understanding and reinforce the information (see Excerpt 5.27).

Excerpt 5.27 Anli Y8 L3

T: [The good manner is a good habit. Did you understand them at the beginning? The behaviour of the student at the beginning was]
STs: [Not good]
T: [It was bad manner, very impolite, right?]
…
T: (showing PPT) Good habits are very important for us. What's the Chinese meaning?
STs: [good habits are]
T: [for us]
STs: [very important]
T: Very important. Old habits die hard?
STs: [Old habits die hard]
T: But the bad habits must change.
STs: [But the bad habits must change.]
T: [Must?]
STs: [change]
T: [Although old habits die hard, what must we do? Change them]

Anli used this presentation as input and a starting point to review the key sentences that appeared in the unit, making learning more relevant, contextualized and meaningful.

On the third day, four students gave a presentation as a group, two acting as reporters and two as student interviewees. Before the class began, they had already written 'Chinese Teenagers' with some drawings and a picture of the national flag of China stuck to the blackboard. During their presentation, they used pictures of fruit and real objects such as cups and bottles as stage props. The presentation was well prepared and well presented; the students really put effort into it. This activity not only brought out students' potential but also facilitated the development of their creativity. After the presentation, Anli asked the class to give comments, guiding from what perspective to comment (see Excerpt 5.28).

Excerpt 5.28 Anli Y8 L4

T: [Ok, now let's give some feedback on aspects that they have done well and aspects that need improving, Ok, ST1]
ST1: [Overall, they have cooperated very well, as it is hard for four people to rehearse.

It is already very good that they can rehearse so well. It can be better if they hadn't laughed during the presentation]

T: … [What else? What else? Give them some suggestions, or comment on aspects that they have done well. I think there are many good aspects. Can't you see? Can you see what is on the blackboard?]

1ST: [Oh, they have written something on the blackboard]

T: [En, it means how they have prepared?]

T& STs: [Very well!]

T: [What else? What did they use when asking about vegetables and fruits?]

STs: [Pictures.]

T: Yes, pictures, pictures, [Pictures they drew. Aren't they well prepared? They have done a wonderful preparation, I feel. Anything else?]

1ST: [stage props]

T: [Yes, stage props as well.]

1ST: [I think they spoke fluently.]

T: [Yes, regarding language, they spoke very fluently. What did they do with what we have learnt in Unit 2? They incorporated all that we have learnt in this unit. Simply wonderful! The only pity is that they laughed a bit. Ok, now, give a score]

STs: 9

T: [9.5. Please record!]

Throughout the whole process, Anli cared particularly about the process of learning and thinking, students' cognitive and metacognitive development, the ability to make judgements and evaluations, as well as knowing how and why.

In comparison, Dongmei evidently attached a different importance to this activity which therefore worked differently and less efficiently in her class. For example, in the first lesson, a student stood at the front of the classroom saying something in a voice too low to hear, seemingly intimidated, not standing properly nor looking at the class. Dongmei was standing beside rather than leaving the stage to this student. This activity ended with no comment or encouragement from the teacher or students with Dongmei quickly moving on to the next activity. In the second lesson, another student was reading a story from a computer screen, but he was reading too fast to understand. In the end, he tried to engage the class by asking questions, which then led to some comments from the teacher that were not constructive or meaningful (see Excerpt 5.29).

Excerpt 5.29 Dongmei Y9 L2

ST1: [What does this story tell us?]
STs: (laughter)
T: [Can you tell? Could you follow him? ST2, what does the story tell us?]
ST2: [We should treasure things that are useful, because]. . . (inaudible)
T: ST3, [tell us]
ST3: . . . (inaudible)
STs: (laughter)
T: [I feel, Ok, sit down please! ST3 was talking nonsense, because ST1 read too quickly and the content was a bit difficult. ST2 did well as he nearly got what ST1 read. Very good. The rest of you simply could not follow]. Ok, now, please, first, please take out your exercise books, and we will have a dictation.

On the third day, a student stood in the front of the class and said something about herself. As soon as she stopped, the class clapped voluntarily, but Dongmei only gave minimal feedback then quickly moved on to the next activity (see Excerpt 5.30).

Excerpt 5.30 Dongmei Y9 L3

ST1: (Giving class report, introducing herself).
STs: (Clapping hands voluntarily as soon as ST1 finishes the presentation.)
T: OK, [did he speak well?]
STs: [Yes!]
T: [Well-prepared, good, a bit nervous]. Ok, now, [dictation] please! [Are you ready?]
…

Thus, in Dongmei's terms, 'class report' exists as a form only, not seemingly useful for the majority of the students as it lacked feedback, meaningful discussion and engagement. No comments were given regarding the expectation of the presentation – for example, speed, stage style, voice, whether to read something out or speak it out. Dongmei seemed to rush towards the next step as soon as possible after the students finished the presentation, not caring how this process was carried out and whether it was meaningful and effective for promoting learning. Dongmei generally provided feedback except for in this activity, in which she did not ask students to give feedback either.

Enya used oral presentation only on one occasion, when she asked students to draw a family picture so as to introduce their family to the class based on the picture (see Excerpt 5.31). While the class were drawing the picture, she asked three students to

stand up at the same time as a group to recite the dialogue to her. About 16 minutes later, she asked students to come to the front to introduce the people they had drawn in their picture.

Excerpt 5.31 Enya Y7 L4

T: [Ok, I will ask you to introduce your family you have just drawn], ST1 come here. [Your picture is too small]
STS: (laughter)
T: [First greet the class!] Hello everyone!
ST1: Hello everyone!
T: [Look here, look here! Look at the class!]
STS: (laughter)
ST1: This is my mother. …
…
T: ST3
ST3: [I didn't draw!]
T: T: [You didn't draw? Open your mouth (to speak!)]. You draw it now, and say it when you have finished drawing. Next one, next one (meaning ST4)
ST4: Oh! My name is ST4. This is my mother. Her name is Mary …

In this way, Enya facilitated authentic use of English to talk about their own family members, even though using a different medium rather than real family photos.

5.7.3 Whole class game-like activities

Whole class game-like activities were used by Anli, Bailin, Chen and Enya to engage students in authentic use of the language. Excerpt 5.32 is an example of Chen's class, when she asked students to practise asking and answering names at the beginning of a lesson after the greeting. Starting with the first row, students asked the second row their names, who in turn, asked the next row. When they had finished asking and answering names, Chen asked the students to report whether there was anyone who had not been able to respond properly. Whenever such a student was identified, Chen instructed the whole class to ask this question to the student again to reinforce the dialogue.

Excerpt 5.32 Chen Y7 L2

T: OK, good! Now, what's your first name? Go, go, go!
STs: (Started asking 'what's your first name' from the first row, in turn, to the last row).
. . .

T: Ok, [this group, who made a mistake just now]?
STs: ST2.
T: [Ok, let's ask him].
STs: What's your first name?
ST2: My first name is Y
T: Ok, his first name is Y. OK, this group? [Anybody wrong]?
…
T: Ok, this group? OK, ST4 please, Ok, [let's ask him].
STs: What's your first name?
ST4: My first name is Z
T: OK, [change and ask him again].
STs: What's your given name?
T4: My given name is B
…

In this activity, at any given moment, 12 people were given the opportunity to speak, asking and answering names, while the teacher could still keep an eye on what was going on. Chen then engaged the whole class in authentic questioning on the names of those students who might have made a mistake.

5.7.4 Pair/group work activities

Pair/group activities that facilitate speaking and communication were frequently used by Anli and Bailin, occasionally used by Chen, Enya, Fang and Guiyun, but never used by Dongmei. Anli used pair work for students to ask questions about each other's parents, compare figures on PPT or compare two classmates, and ask about frequencies of doing things. She also asked students to work in groups to introduce their own parents to their group members. Bailin asked students to work in pairs to create a dialogue asking each other's names, asking other students' names, asking telephone numbers, and working in groups asking about one another's names. Other teachers only occasionally used pair/group work. Chen asked students to work in fours to ask about one another's names, Enya asked students to work in pairs introducing figures in pictures and acting out a dialogue. Fang asked students to work in pairs to discuss what people usually do on vacation, and Guiyun asked students to work in fours to discuss and introduce Halloween.

Excerpt 5.33 is an example of Bailin's class, when she asked the students to have a conversation in pairs using real names of the classmates, rather than only to recite the text or dialogue.

Excerpt 5.33 Bailin Y7 L1

T: Ok, now, first, let's review the lesson. Make a conversation as 2B in Section A. [Now please imitate the dialogue in 2B. You can all recite it, can't you? Now replace the names using real names.]

…

T: Ok, who will try?

T: ST1, who is your partner?

ST1: ST2

T: Ok

ST1: Good afternoon! My name is ST1. Are you ST2?

ST2: Yes, I am. Nice to meet you, ST1.

ST1: Nice to meet you, too. What's her name?

ST2: Her name is ST3.

ST1: Is he ST4?

ST2: No, he isn't. He is ST5.

T: Very good, sit down please.

…

Excerpt 5.34 is an example of Enya's class, when she asked students to work in pairs to ask and answer questions based on some pictures on PPT.

Excerpt 5.34 Enya Y7 L3

T: [Ok, work in pairs]. Who's she? Who's he? Who are they?

…

T: Stop here, [We do not need much time to prepare, don't we], ST1.

ST1: Who are they?

ST2: They are her grandparents.

ST1: Who is he?

ST2: He is her father.

T: Sit down,

ST3: Who is she?

ST4: She is her mother.

ST3: Who are they?

ST4: They are her parents.

T: Sit down, ST5

These two examples show how pair/group work was used to maximize the opportunities for interaction, learning, practicing and authentic or meaningful use of the language.

However, pair work and group work do not always guarantee effective oral practice and interaction. Excerpt 5.35 is an example of Fang's class.

Excerpt 5.35 Fang Y8 L1

T: 3C, ask your groups about their last vacation then tell the class your results. Results, [we talked about it yesterday. What does it mean?]
STs: [result]
T: [Right! Have you done it? Now work in 4s quickly! Hurry up! Tick the answers to the questions and then select someone report about your group.] In a group, everyone ate something at the restaurant. [Then what else? Be quick!] (students discussing in groups) …
T: [OK, which group?] Which group will be the first one? Ok, ST1, [on behalf of your group, finish the sentence] in our group…
ST1: [Eh, our group, that is]
T: in English please (STs laughter)
ST1: [The first one is] everyone
T: No, you should use sentences. [You need to say it in a sentence]: In our group, clear?
ST1: . . .
T: [Ok, you stop here. I will give you an example. ST2, your group first!]
ST2: In our group,
T: [Listen to see how others say it,] Ok?
ST2: In our group, everyone ate something at the restaurant. Er . . . read anything
T: Read something interesting. [It is a question,] did you, [and now your need to state it,] right? Er, [they read something interesting, read something interesting. Right! Continue!] …
T: Ok, ST1, are you clear now?
ST1: No
T: [Do you know how to report?]
STs: [Not quite clear.]
T: [You need to report to the class the result of the questions you asked just now on behalf of your group member. Understand?]

Fang's words seem to suggest that she is unwilling to spend time doing this activity (see Line 4). She might have left the students with an impression that the activity was unnecessary or unimportant. Perhaps, as students are not accustomed to doing group work or because she did not state clearly how to carry out the activity, the students were unclear about how to do it and thus did not do well in the reporting process.

5.7.5 Summary

Teachers used four types of activities to facilitate students' English speaking and communication: authentic questioning activities were used by all but Guiyun; oral presentation activity by Anli and Dongmei routinely and by Enya occasionally; whole class game-like activity (Anli, Bailin, Chen, Enya); and pair/group work activities used by Anli and Bailin frequently and by Chen, Enya, Fang and Guiyun occasionally. The degrees to which teachers' practices align with learner-centred practices are mapped out in Table 5.14.

Table 5.14 Alignment of teachers' practices with learner-centredness – Speaking and communication activities

Category of activities and tasks	**Alignment with learner-centredness**			
	Not at all	A little	Some extent	Great extent
Speaking and communication		F G	C D E	A B

Legend: A – Anli; B – Bailin; C – Chen; D – Dongmei; E – Enya; F – Fang; G – Guiyun

Anli's and Bailin's practices to a great extent align with learner-centredness. They used a variety of activities effectively to engage students in speaking English and to develop students' communicative competence, from authentic questions to pair/group work. Their practice facilitated active and deep learning by involving students in sharing, peer interaction and learning when students took an active part in and responsibility for the learning process. In contrast, Fang's and Guiyun's practices are only to a little degree learner-centred, as they provided limited opportunities to facilitate students' English speaking and communication ability, with occasional pair/group activities and limited authentic questioning. The other three teachers, Chen, Dongmei and Enya are in between the two extremes in this regard, with practices to some degree are aligned with learner-centred practices.

5.8 Findings and discussion

This chapter has analyzed teachers' practices from the perspective of classroom

activities and tasks. A wide variety of activities were identified, ranging from mechanistic drilling and reading aloud, grammar-translation activities, to practicing English in authentic and meaningful ways. Some of the activities projected students as disengaged passive recipients of knowledge, while some others facilitated active learning and thinking, as well as peer interaction and discussion. Some teachers (Anli, Bailin) kept a balanced focus on the development of linguistic and communicative competence, while others focused more on the development of students' linguistic competence, primarily telling about the rules, rather than using activities to facilitate the use of the language and the internalization of the rules and the forms (Guiyun, Fang). Some spent a great amount of time dealing with grammar-translation based written exercises (Chen).

Learner-centred teachers, according to the framework established in Chapters 2 and 4, use a variety of activities that:

- are interesting, relevant, of an appropriate level of challenge
- facilitate collaboration and peer teaching, active thinking and discovery
- involve multiple senses of the learners
- cater for different learning styles and pace
- give opportunity for students to demonstrate the command of or apply new knowledge.

The analysis of teachers' practices in each sub-section has enabled an evaluation of the degree to which teachers' practices are aligned with learner-centredness and this has been mapped out in the matrix at the end of each section. To provide an overview of the alignment with learner-centredness of teachers' overall practices regarding classroom activities and tasks, these matrices are now synthesized into Table 5.15, taking into consideration the overall analysis and findings in this chapter.

Table 5.15 Alignment of teachers' practices with learner-centredness – Activities and tasks

Categories of activities and tasks	Alignment with learner-centredness			
	Hardly	A little	Some extent	Great extent
Revision and conclusion		C F	A D E G	B
New words teaching	C D E F G			A B
Grammar teaching		D E F G	B C	A
Reading		F G		A D
Listening		C D E F G		A B
Speaking and communication		F G	C D E	A B
Overall		C E F G	D	A B

Legend: A – Anli; B – Bailin; C – Chen; D – Dongmei; E – Enya; F – Fang; G – Guiyun

Overall, Anli's and Bailin's practices are to a great extent aligned with learner-centred practices. First, they used a wide range of class activities and tasks to engage students in active processing of knowledge and information, building on students' prior learning and experience, making learning relevant and interesting to students. Second, they engaged students in meaningful practice and authentic use of English with frequent questioning and pair/group work, thereby providing a range of opportunities for students to develop their English speaking and communication ability. Third, rather than being the centre of the class doing the learning and telling, they let students 'do' the practicing, learning and thinking. Thus, the students are positioned to have equally active roles in the learning process as the teachers.

Overall, Dongmei's practices are to some degree aligned with learner-centred practices. First, she facilitated students' speaking ability development by asking authentic questions and having meaningful discussions on topics relevant to students, based on the topics of the reading and listening passages. She also used the daily class sharing activity for students to give oral presentations, although without feedback and discussion about the speaker's presentation as Anli did. Second, she facilitated students'

thinking and discussion by asking students to reflect, recall and report about what they had learnt previously, to discuss in pairs and provide group answers to the reading comprehension task and share important points with the class. Third, Dongmei facilitated students' learning ability and strategies – for example, in dealing with reading comprehension when she asked students to read and guess the main ideas and then scan to find answers, underlining important points and sharing them with the class.

The other four teachers' practices are only to a little degree learner-centred. Among them, Chen and Enya occasionally engaged students in meaningful practice and authentic use of English. Chen, however, spent a large proportion of time doing written exercises or checking answers, focusing on covering the answers of the exercises and homework. Her practice proved to be quite exam-focused and grammar-translation based. Enya occasionally used pair work activity to engage students in meaningful practice of English and used oral presentation activities for students to speak in front of the class. However, most activities were grammar-translation oriented, with the relevance and authentic use of the language seeming to be of less priority.

Fang also occasionally engaged learners in meaningful practice and authentic use of language, and occasionally used pair/group work for students to interact and practice English. This kind of activity, however, was not effective as she did it in a way that made it seem unimportant and unnecessary. She did not provide opportunities for students to discuss, negotiate or deepen their understanding. Most of the time, Fang was the one telling about the language, mainly using passive and mechanistic reading in chorus, grammar-translation activities and exercises. Guiyun's practices were generally similar to Fang's except that she asked students to reflect and write out what they found important, interesting or difficult on the blackboard to start the revision accordingly. This practice did facilitate students' active learning and reflection, but it was limited to written English only rather than asking students to report orally as well.

These findings raise four concerns about the effectiveness of certain practices, where criteria of effective teaching, as defined in Section 2.2.3, include: facilitating active thinking, participation, interaction, engagement and reflection; maximizing language input, practice and output; facilitating the development of learners' overall language ability, learning and thinking ability, creativity, and ability to make choices and taking responsibility for learning; being responsive to learner needs and feedback; and making learning relevant, interesting, meaningful to learners.

First, the time spent on written work or exercises raises a concern about the effectiveness of the 45 minute class time for facilitating the development of students' overall language ability. Spending a lot of time having students do written exercises and checking answers deprived students of the opportunity to develop other abilities, such as speaking, listening and communication. Some of the exercises could have been completed as homework by students to save the precious class time for more teacher-facilitated meaningful learning and interaction, as the class is mostly the only place for the majority of students to speak English.

A second concern is that using a certain activity does not guarantee the effectiveness of learning and teaching. What counts more is the value the teacher attaches to an activity as well as how the activity is organized. This value in turn influences the perceived meaningfulness of an activity to the student and therefore the effectiveness of an activity in facilitating learning. For example, both Anli and Dongmei used the class sharing activity routinely; however, the effectiveness differed greatly. In Anli's class, the students were allowed freedom to make decisions on the *what, how, with whom* and *when* questions regarding the presentations. Students' creativity was encouraged and each day the presentations took on different forms, ranging from individuals giving a speech to group role plays. Some students used the data projector to aid their presentation, and some used real objects or pictures. Importantly, all the other students were expected to listen carefully as they were responsible for giving feedback and even grading the presenter(s). Anli used these activities to optimize students' learning by

encouraging creative thinking, decision making and freedom of choice by engaging the whole class in reflection, discussion and evaluation of the presentations. In contrast, Dongmei's use of this activity seemed merely a process to be carried out and it appeared meaningless for the students who were not presenting. She did not give much feedback or suggestions on the presentations, nor did she engage the whole class in meaningful discussion or feedback. Therefore, for the presenter, it was just a task to stand in front of the class to speak or read out something, while for the other students, it was not much to do with them, as they were not expected to give any comment or feedback. The whole process just passed quickly and was not used as an opportunity for real learning and discussion. A possible consequence is that students might become demotivated to prepare for and participate in such activities.

Similarly, group work does not guarantee the effectiveness of teaching. Observations suggest that effectiveness depended on how the teacher organized the activity, whether a routine was established and whether the teacher was skilful in organizing such activities. In Fang's case, her words for organizing the activity might have left the students with an impression that the activity was unnecessary or unimportant. When the routine was not well-established and the requirements not clearly stated as in Fang's class, students could just ask each other to finish the little survey by ticking the answers or talking in Chinese rather than in English. That partly explains why the students were not successful in reporting to the whole class. The value teachers attach to an activity influences how they organize the activity, which in turn influences the effectiveness of the activity in facilitating learning and teaching.

A third concern is that some teachers did not teach responsively to learners' development and needs. Teachers cannot assume that what is covered in the class is learnt by the students. Nor should they presume that students know what the teacher is thinking. Concepts and learning that seem to be clear and easy in the teacher's mind may not be clear or easy for students. Therefore teaching needs to be responsive to learners in order to close the gap, diminish mismatches of understanding, interpretation

and perceptions, as well as mismatches between teaching and the level of students' cognitive development (Nunan, 1995), as such mismatches might cause students' resistance (Barcelos, 2000).

A fourth concern is that teachers' practices need to be understood in context. For example, given the fact that English is still studied as a foreign language in China where students do not use English to communicate in everyday life, the commonly used activity of reading aloud in chorus is regarded as a necessary and effective activity for students to become familiar with accurate sounds, associating the sounds with forms and meaning. This practice, which has a deep-rooted history, is well-justified in China, where the learning of the Chinese characters follows two principles:

- Using the Five Organs: the eyes to see the shape, the ears to hear the sound, the hand to write the shape, the mouth to speak the sound, the mind to think about the meaning.
- Contextualized learning: each character as it is learnt is formed with another into a word and each word is formed into a sentence (Biggs 1998, p. 726-727).

Therefore, this kind of reading aloud and repetition must be distinguished from rote learning, as it involves all the senses for meaning making.

5.9 Chapter summary

This chapter has presented the activities and tasks the teachers used in class from six of the eight main components of teaching identified: 1) revision and conclusion; 2) new words teaching; 3) grammar teaching; 4) teaching of reading comprehension; 5) teaching of listening; 6) oral practices; 7) dealing with exercises and 8) dealing with exam papers. The alignment of teachers' practices with learner-centredness has been evaluated in each section and synthesised in Table 5.15. This chapter has provided an overview of what teachers and students did in the classes, providing an insight into the nature of different activities and tasks used, revealing how learning is facilitated or constrained in different activities and tasks. This chapter argues that the 45 minute class

time should be used to facilitate learners' overall language ability development, especially in a context where English is a foreign language and daily use of English is low. The second argument is that adopting an activity does not guarantee its effectiveness in facilitating learning. What counts more is how the activity is organized and what value is attached to it by the teacher, and whether students' input and feedback are taken into consideration to make teaching more responsive to learners. A third argument is that the effectiveness of an activity needs to be understood in the context where it is used.

Classroom activities and tasks are only one aspect of the complex classroom teaching process, and thus only provide a partial view of teachers' practices. To have a more comprehensive insight into teachers' practices, other aspects of classroom teaching also need to be explored. The next chapter will analyze teachers' practices regarding classroom interaction and discourse, to reveal the nature of the verbal and nonverbal interaction that takes place in the classroom and how these have facilitated or hindered active learning and thinking.

Chapter 6 Classroom Interaction and discourse

This chapter analyzes teachers' practices regarding classroom interaction and discourse, Generally speaking, all seven teachers gave clear instructions and explanations regarding both the content and classroom procedures. Their practices varied greatly regarding other aspects of classroom interaction and discourse, which will be analyzed and presented in detail in this chapter. Section 6.1 focuses on the interaction patterns within the class to unveil how the class is organized, and who is interacting with whom when the students are not working individually or altogether as a whole group. Section 6.2 focuses on the discourse patterns that teachers adopted, and how these facilitated or constrained students' contributions to classroom interaction and the learning process. Section 6.3 focuses on the questioning features that were deployed by the teachers and how these features engaged or disengaged the students in the learning process and how students' thinking was promoted or constrained. Section 6.4 focuses on the processes of giving feedback and error correction that took place in each class, with a view to analyze the effectiveness of teacher practice in facilitating learning and engagement. Section 6.5 deals with teachers' turn allocation features, to unveil the learning and participation opportunities that were facilitated or constrained. The alignment of teachers' practices with learner-centredness is evaluated in each section. Section 6.6 concludes this chapter by summarizing and discussing the findings, addressing the question of the extent to which teachers' practices can be considered learner-centred.

6.1 Interaction patterns

All seven teachers involved students in reading or doing something altogether or individually at the same time, for example, reading words or texts in chorus as a group, reading individually in a low voice or silently, or doing written exercises individually. When the classes were not organized in this way, five interaction patterns were identified (see Table 6.1). The T-T pattern refers to teachers both initiating and responding; the T-WC pattern refers to teacher and whole class; T-1ST involves the

teacher interacting with a single student; and then there is the Group-Group pattern and Pair/Group work. These patterns are explained in detail.

Table 6.1 Interaction patterns

Interaction patterns	Anli	Bailin	Chen	Dongmei	Enya	Fang	Guiyun
T-T pattern	Y-	Y-	Y	Y-	Y	Y+	Y+
T-WC pattern	Y	Y	Y	Y+	Y	Y-	Y+
T-1ST pattern	Y	Y	Y+	Y+	Y+	Y-	Y-
Group-Group pattern	Y			Y			
Pair/Group work	Y+	Y+	Y-	Y-	Y-	Y-	Y-

Legend: Y = the pattern was used by a teacher; Y+ = the pattern was used by a teacher more frequently; Y- = the pattern was used by a teacher less frequently

6.1.1 T-T pattern

The T-T pattern refers to the teacher asking a question or saying something and providing the answer or response herself. This pattern was used by all teachers, with Fang and Guiyun heavily relying on it. When dealing with exam papers, Chen and Enya also mainly used the T-T pattern. Excerpt 6.1 is an example of the T-T pattern taken from Chen's class when she was using the T-T pattern in dealing with an exam paper.

Excerpt 6.1 Chen L4 Y7

T: [Everyone look at this sentence please!] Where is Cheng Hai's school? … Many of you answered] No.3 middle school. [This is wrong. Then what is the standard answer? How should we answer this question? The full answer is] (T write on Bb) Cheng Hai, [please correct it, as I will collect your exam paper and check it when we finish].

STS: [Ok!]

T: Cheng Hai's school is in Beijing … [This is the standard answer, but there is a simpler answer which is also correct. Let's write it. Capitalize the initial letter] In Beijing. [You can get 2 points with this answer, but if you do not capitalize the initial letter you will lose points. The full answer is] Cheng Hai's school is in Beijing. Ok, No 2, [question No 62] …

Chen explained clearly and expanded as appropriate. However she was mainly providing the correct answers. Using this pattern, although teachers asked questions, the real purpose seemed to be alerting students to an item and telling students the answers. Even though few students responded, it did not seem to matter to the teacher. Therefore,

the students' minds might have been disengaged and inactive as they did not need to be prepared to interact or respond. Only one or two students responded while most students were taking notes, correcting mistakes or doing something else.

6.1.2 T-WC pattern

The T-WC pattern refers to the teacher asking a question or saying something and the whole class or most of the students answering or responding at the same time. This pattern was used by all teachers, with Dongmei and Guiyun using it to a greater extent. Excerpt 6.2 is an example of such an interaction pattern in Anli's class.

Excerpt 6.2 Anli Y8 L4

T: Ok, now we are going to spend a few minutes summarize what we have learnt today.
STS: The comparative degree!
T: Good, now tell me what part of speech?
STS: The comparative degree of adjectives (T showing notes on the data projector)
T: Good, the comparative degree of adjectives and adverbs. I want to ask if verbs have comparative degree.
…
T: Ok, please do not look at your book as you were required to preview it last night. Please answer me: how many degrees do adjectives have?
STs: Three.

The T-WC pattern generated more responses from the students compared with the T-T pattern. However, the interactions and the responses that the students produced were controlled by the teacher. Anli explained that when doing the summary of comparative degrees of adjectives, originally she had planned to encourage the students to speak and talk about the grammar rules, but in the end she spoke more, especially when she felt that the students were not responding quickly and when it was close to the end of the lesson, running short of time. After class she reflected and regretted that she did not allow the students to speak more. Anli also pointed out that when she was teaching, she might not be able to think or notice something, but when she observed others' teaching, she would reflect and relate to her own teaching and think of better ways to involve her students.

6.1.3 T-1ST Pattern

The T-1ST pattern refers to the teacher asking one student to answer questions, say something or do something at a time. It was used by all teachers, with Chen, Dongmei and Enya using it to a greater degree. Excerpt 6.3 is an example of the T-1ST from Dongmei's class, when the students had finished doing some exercises and Dongmei was checking the answers.

Excerpt 6.3 Dongmei Y9 L3

T: [Have you all finished? Some students are already doing exercises in 4B. Ok, let's check the answers together].
T: No.1: Children under 18 [Children under 18 are not what? are not allowed, so what we should fill the blank with?]
STS: are not
…
T: Ok, No 2, [I am going to ask someone to give us the answer]. (T reading the sentence) [Ok, now, who wants to try? Good, St3 please. What should we fill the blank with?]
St3: are paid . . .
T: are paid each month. [Correct?]
ST4: No
T: [Not correct? Correct or not?]
STS: [Correct.]
T: Ok, [it is correct. ST4, what did you say it should be?]
ST4: were paid
T: Ok, sit down please. [He used the past tense, but the sentence says] every month. [Every month, right? Ok, next one.] No.3, No 3, What language, ST5 please
ST5: What language is spoken in Germany?

In this process of checking the answers, Dongmei mainly used the T-WC or T-1ST patterns. Similarly, Guiyun called upon individual students to give answers after students had finished the exercises individually, which was a normal practice among teachers except for Bailin. This approach lacked peer interaction, checking, correction, sharing and discussing.

6.1.4 Group–Group pattern and Pair/Group work pattern

The Group-Group pattern refers to a group of students reading or saying something and the other group(s) observing or responding. This pattern was only used by Anli and

Dongmei. For example, Anli used the Group-Group pattern in a follow-up activity reinforcing newly learnt words, when she asked a whole group to stand up and translate in chorus or one-by-one the words on screen or said by the teacher while the other groups watched and provided comments (see Section 5.3). Dongmei frequently used the Group-Group and Boys-Girls patterns for students to read aloud texts or dialogues, with different groups taking on different roles in the dialogue.

The Pair/Group work pattern refers to students working in pairs or groups doing or saying something. This pattern was frequently used by Anli and Bailin and occasionally used by other teachers. Anli asked students to work in pairs to translate, read or recite words, sentences or dialogues, to discuss questions or discuss how to compare two people, and to accomplish a task of asking, introducing and then reporting about each other's parents in pairs and in fours.

Bailin frequently asked students to work in pairs or in fours to have conversations. She also engaged students in pair checking or marking of exercises, dictation or homework. In comparison, the other teachers only occasionally used pair or group work to practice reading dialogues (Enya), to discuss in pairs what people like to do on vacations and to work in fours to find out and report what the group members did during their vacation (Fang), to share and discuss the answers for reading comprehension questions (Dongmei), to work in fours to discuss and report about Halloween (Guiyun) and to check answers (Chen).

6.1.5 Summary

The analysis has identified five interaction patterns, four of which were used by all seven teachers to varying degrees, while the Group-Group pattern was exclusively used by Anli and Dongmei. Anli, Dongmei and Bailin varied their interaction patterns frequently and used the pair/group work pattern more than other teachers. Fang and Guiyun heavily relied on the T-T pattern and the T-WC patterns, dominating the class talking time. Chen and Enya used the T-T pattern frequently when explaining exam

papers.

The degree of teacher control and dominance in each pattern of interaction varies, with the T-T pattern having the greatest degree and the pair/group work pattern the least. Different interaction patterns achieved different effects, depending on the purposes of the teacher. The effectiveness depended on teachers' explanation and instruction as well as the value attached to it. Students were more interested and more engaged when Anli and Bailin varied their interaction patterns, to provide more students with opportunities to participate, discuss and report. On the other hand, heavy reliance on the T-T, T-WC and T-1ST patterns limited language input, practice and output, as well as students' opportunity to think, negotiate and discuss, which may result in students' disengagement.

From a learner-centred point of view, teachers should use varied interaction patterns and frequently use pair/group work to facilitate learning and interaction. The degree to which teachers' practices are aligned with learner-centred practices is mapped out in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2 Alignment of teachers' practices with learner-centredness – Interaction patterns

Interaction and discourse	**Alignment with learner-centredness**			
	Hardly	A little	Some extent	Great extent
Interaction patterns		F G	C E	A B D

Legend: A – Anli; B – Bailin; C – Chen; D – Dongmei; E – Enya; F – Fang; G – Guiyun

Based on the analysis in this section, the classroom interaction patterns of Anli, Bailin, and Dongmei are to a great extent aligned with learner-centred practices. Fang's and Guiyun's practices can be said to be learner-centred to a little degree, given that they occasionally used the pair/group work. Chen's and Enya's practices fall between the two as they are to some degree aligned with learner-centred practices.

6.2 Questioning

This section analyzes the features of questioning identified in the seven teachers' classes. The five key features were: 1) constant questioning; 2) giving enough time for contemplating, preparing and discussion; 3) asking higher-order questions; 4) student initiation of questions; and 5) varying discourse patterns (see Table 6.3). Overall, constantly asking questions to interact with students and engage students in active thinking and learning is a feature identified in Anli's and Bailin's classes. It is also a feature in Dongmei's, Chen's and Enya's classes except for when dealing with exam papers or exercises. After initiating a question, teachers generally did not provide much time for students to think, prepare or discuss before answering questions, with Anli and Bailin allowing more time than the other teachers. Higher-order questions were occasionally used by all seven teachers, but mainly for students to explain the reasons for their grammar-translation based answers. Student-initiated questioning was frequently used by Bailin and occasionally used by Anli. Some teachers used a variety of discourse patterns while others heavily relied on a certain pattern. Details of teachers' practices regarding higher-order questioning, student-initiated questioning and discourse patterns are explained in the following subsections.

Table 6.3 Overview of teachers' questioning features

Questioning	Anli	Bailin	Chen	Dongmei	Enya	Fang	Guiyun
Constant questioning	Y	Y	Y-	Y-	Y-	N	N
Giving enough waiting time	Y-	Y-	N	N	N	N	N
Higher-order questioning	Y-	Y-	Y-	Y-	Y-	Y-	Y-
Student-initiated questioning	Y-	Y	N	N	N	N	N
Using varied discourse patterns	Y+	Y	N	Y	N	N	N

Legend: Y= the feature was used by a teacher; Y+ = the feature was used by a teacher more frequently; Y- = the feature was used by a teacher less frequently; N = the feature was not used by a teacher

6.2.1 Higher-order questioning

Higher-order questions such as ‘why’ questions were used by all the teachers, but mainly to ask students to explain why they chose an answer. Only Anli and Dongmei occasionally asked students to synthesize information and explain their reasons. Excerpt 6.4 taken from Chen’s class is an example of asking students to explain why they have chosen a particular answer.

Excerpt 6.4 Chen Y7 L3

T: OK, now, look at: filling the blanks. [Filling the blanks. Use your brain!] ST1
ST1: The friends, [add an ‘s’ at the back of ‘friend’].
T: Friends, what’s the meaning of friends?
T: ST2, you try.
ST2: Friends
T: Why?
ST2: [Because there are two people].
T: Two?
STS: [Three people].
T: [Three people, so what should we use]?
T: [What to add]?
ST2: s
…
T: OK, No 3, ST4, please!
ST4: This
T: How to spell this?
ST4: t-h-i-s
T: [Why use ‘this’]?
ST4: [because it is a singular noun]
T: [Yes, singular, so we use ‘this’], OK,

Chen asked ‘why’ questions which mainly facilitate the recall of declarative knowledge about the language, in this case, the plural forms of nouns or pronouns.

Higher-order questions for the students to synthesize information and to explain their thinking is very occasionally identified in Anli’s and Dongmei’s classes. For an example, see Excerpt 5.20. Anli asked students to discuss the answer in groups of four. The questions she asked required students to synthesize information and develop a true understanding of what was being taught. They promoted students to think at a higher

level than recalling words and grammar rules. However, such questions were not a common practice among the teachers.

6.2.2 Student-initiated questioning

Student-initiated questioning is a feature occasionally facilitated by Anli and frequently by Bailin. Anli once asked students to find and report what they do not understand in the listening transcript and then she asked other students to explain (see Excerpt 5.25). In comparison, Bailin frequently asked students to point out which questions they still did not understand and then asked other students to explain. She only explained when no students seemed to be able to do so (see Excerpt 6.5).

Excerpt 6.5 Bailin Y7 L2

T: [Who can tell us the correct answers from 41 to 45? Ok, ST1]
ST1: ACBBC
T: [OK, sit down please! 41 to 45, ACBBC. Clear? Ok, be quick if you have questions] ST2(hand rising)
ST2: [questions 41 and 44]
T: [Ok, 41 and 44, who can explain 41? Ok, our subject representative ST3 is raising her hand. ST3 please!]
ST3: [Question 41, it is a girl, girl begins with a vowel, oh, sorry, it doesn't begin with an vowel, so we need to use 'a ', therefore we need to say a girl, so the answer is A]
…
T: [Ok, question 44. Who can explain? ST4]
ST4: [44, because] she [is a third person single, so need to use the third person single form of the verb.]
T: [Ok, ST4 has given a complete answer, but …]

Student-initiated questioning is an opportunity for students to reflect on what they have learnt and what they still do not understand. This practice not only facilitates more active learning and thinking, but also makes the learning more purposeful.

6.2.3 Discourse patterns

Three main discourse patterns are identified among the seven teachers: 1) the I-R-(F) pattern – the teacher *initiates* a question, directs the question to t*he whole class to* ***r****espond*, then the teacher gives *feedback* or simply asks another question; 2) the I-N-R-(F) pattern – the teacher ***i****nitiates* a question, *nominates* a student to *respond*, then

the teacher gives *feedback* or simply moves on to the next question without giving feedback; 3) the N-I-R-(F) pattern – the teacher *nominates* a student before *initiating* a question, the student *responds* and then the teacher gives ***f****eedback* or simply moves on to the next question. Another important feature is the *follow-up move* which refers to teachers' practices of following up with expanded questions or directing a modified question to others after the above three patterns.

The I-R-(F) and the I-N-R-(F) patterns are used by all teachers. The former used more frequently by Guiyun than other teachers while the latter used more frequently by Chen, Fang and Guiyun. The N-I-R-F pattern is frequently used by Enya, occasionally used by Anli, Bailin, Dongmei and Guiyun, and rarely used by Chen and Fang. *Follow-up moves* are frequently used by Anli while others use it occasionally (Chen) or rarely. These features are explained in detail in this section.

6.2.3.1 The I-R-(F) pattern

The I-R-(F) pattern was commonly used, especially in activities such as introducing new grammar content. Guiyun used this pattern to a greater extent than others. For example, in Excerpt 6.6, Guiyun heavily relied on this pattern, directing the question to the whole class if not responding to her own questions. Throughout the whole 40-minute class only seven individual students were nominated to respond to her questions.

Excerpt 6.6 Guiyun Y9 L2

T:	[Let's review the exclamation sentences we studied yesterday. What is called an exclamation sentence?]
a few students:	[expressing happiness, anger, sadness or joyfulness]
T:	[Express what?]
a few students:	[expressing happiness, anger, sadness or joyfulness]
T:	[What are sentences expressing happiness, anger, sadness or joyfulness called?]
STs:	[Exclamations!]
T:	[What are the two normal forms of exclamations?]
STs:	What [and] how

T: What, eh, [sentences begin with] what [and]
STs: How
T: [When do we use] what, [when do we use] how?
STs: [to modify nouns, use] what, [to modify adjectives or adverb, use] how
T: Good …

Using the I-R-(F) pattern, Guiyun must have intended that the whole class would interact and respond to her question, but due to the large class size and everyone being expected to respond, it is highly possible that some students were not really paying attention. Throughout the process, the students only produce such limited responses as Guiyun expected.

6.2.3.2 The I-N-R-(F) pattern

The I-N-R-(F) pattern is also a popular pattern used by the teachers. However, Fang used this pattern more often than the other teachers. Excerpt 6.7 from Fang's class is used as an example. Fang asked students to look at the questions projected on the board, then she nominated an individual student (either volunteering or not) to give the answer. If no answer was received, she directed the question to the whole class, usually a word to fill the blanks. She sometimes read the questions aloud and sometimes did not.

Excerpt 6.7 Fang Y8 L1

T: Let's review, Ok? No.1, who? [Question No.1, who?] Ok, ST3. (PPT showing the questions, T nominate students to answer)
ST3: What, we, where did you do on vacation?
T: [Please say the word for the first blank clearly], we [or] where?
ST3 & STs: Where
T: [Right,] where did you go on vacation? [Isn't it our key sentence?]
STs: [yes]
T: [Isn't it from this unit?] Ok, good, sit down please!
…
T: Good! (Next one) … ST6
ST6: [Should be] no one.
T: No, [no one is here].
…

Although the I-N-R-(F) pattern is used by all seven teachers, the way Fang used this pattern was an extreme example of teacher questioning that constrained students'

contributions to the interaction process and their opportunities to speak and practice English. In this example, the students are limited to producing words only, not full sentences. In the case when Fang did not read the questions aloud, students did not even have the opportunity to listen to the questions but simply looked at the questions silently and provided words to fill the blanks accordingly.

6.2.3.3 The N-I-R-(F) pattern

The N-I-R-F pattern is frequently used by Enya, occasionally used by Anli, Bailin, Dongmei, Guiyun, and rarely used by Chen and Fang. Excerpt 6.8 is an example from Enya's class when she was reviewing the previous lesson.

Excerpt 6.8 Enya Y7 L2

T: Today we are going to learn, we will continue to learn Unit 2. Turn to page 7, Turn to page 7, [turn to page 6. We were learning about 'this' yesterday and the day before yesterday] (write on BB), this [and what else?]
STS: That
T: [and] these,
STS: These
T: [What else?]
STS: Those
T: ST1, stand up. Stand up. [What are all those words called?]
ST1: (at a loss)
STS: [nouns/ English words] (STs laughter)
T: [English words? What kind of words? They need to have a category.] [We call] am, is, are [verb] be [right]?

When Enya called ST1 to stand up before asking the question, ST1 seemed to be at a loss with this unexpected nomination and was not able to answer the question.

Bailin also used this pattern (see Excerpt 6.9), after first giving plenty of practice in three ways of saying names, to check on individual students to see whether they had grasped the three ways. The tone she used sounded non-threatening and the student was able to provide the correct answers. After that, Bailin commented that the other students needed to be patient. ST3 was successful in answering Bailin's question rather than at a loss.

Excerpt 6.9 Bailin Y7 L3

T: [Ok, now we'd like to ask ST3 to answer a question. Ok, your all have read all the ways of answering this question, right? Ok, ST3,] what's her name? (T pointing to a student), give us three answers.
ST3: Her name is ST4.
T: Her name is ST4. Second one? [Second]?
ST3: ST4
T: [the second answer is] ST4. [Good, the third one?]
ST3: Her name is ST4.
T: [Already said, already said, which one is missing?]
ST3: She is ST4.
T: Very good, She is ST4. [Ok, sit down, please! Those students over there be patient, you should let him have a try. Ok, now I will ask and the whole class answer, three answers.] What's her name? (T pointing to 1st).
STs: ST4, her name is ST4. She is ST4.
…

The same pattern seemed to have produced different responses and led to different results in these two examples, suggesting that whether or not a pattern works may be dependent on the context and how the pattern is conducted. Anli occasionally used this pattern explaining that, if she thought the questions were a bit difficult, she would ask those who study better to answer, knowing that they were ready with the answer, so that they could act as 'little teachers'.

6.2.3.4 Follow-up moves

Follow-up moves are frequently used by Anli while occasionally by Chen, or rarely by others. Anli used follow-up moves either to ask the whole class to repeat the answer or to modify the question and direct it to the whole class. For example, after an N-I-R-F pattern, Anli modified the questions and then directed them to the whole class to answer (Excerpt 6.10).

Excerpt 6.10 Anli Y7 L1

T: ST2, how often do you go to the movies?
ST2: I go to the movies once a month.
T: Ok, how often does ST2 go to the movies?
STs: He goes to the movies once a month.
T: Once a?
STs: Month

T: Ok! Very good!
T: ST3 how often do you play computer games?
ST3: I never play computer games.
T: Ok, how often does ST3 play computer games?
STs: She never plays computer games.
T: Plays, [pay attention to the third person singular form of verbs!]

This follow-up move makes the interaction more efficient, enabling students' authentic use of the language (STs' answer). For another example, see Excerpt 6.11.

Excerpt 6.11 Anli Y8 L3

T: Very good, [applause!] (STs clapping hands), [Ok, whole class] Mike is, ready go!
STs: Mike is more outgoing than John.
T: Very good,
…
T: [Ok, Pang Changjiang is funnier than Li Yong] (indicating hand raising), [Ok], ST7
ST7: Pan Changjiang is funnier than Li Yong
T: Very good, [whole class], Pan Changjiang, ready, go!
STs: Pan Changjiang is funnier than Li Yong
T: Ok, try, Mike [is more outgoing than] John. [Ok] ST6
ST6: Mike is more outgoing than John.

These follow-up moves have engaged the whole class effectively. The students are observed to be paying attention and genuinely interested and engaged.

In summary, the I-R-(F) pattern and the I-N-R-(F) pattern are used by all seven teachers. Guiyun heavily relied on the I-R-(F) pattern, while Fang used the I-N-R-(F) pattern more often than other teachers. The N-I-R-F pattern is used by five teachers, with Enya using it more frequently. Follow-up moves are used frequently by Anli to engage the whole class in order to practice the sentences or expand the authentic use of language.

6.2.4 Summary

The analysis shows that constant questioning to facilitate interaction is a prominent feature of Anli's and Bailin's classes, while Chen, Dongmei and Enya asked fewer questions, with Fang and Guiyun asking the fewest questions. Teachers generally did not provide much time for students to think and prepare before giving the answers, with Anli and Bailin providing more time than the other teachers. Anli, Bailin, and Dongmei

used varied discourse patterns efficiently to facilitate students' learning, thinking and engagement. Anli is the only teacher who frequently used follow-up moves after questions to maximize the learning opportunities. Higher-order questions were generally limited to grammar-translation reasoning, except for Anli's and Dongmei's occasional practice of asking questions for students to synthesize information and deepen their understanding. Student-initiated questioning was not a common practice either, being only occasionally used by Anli and frequently used by Bailin.

From a learner-centred perspective, teachers should ask a variety of questions frequently and purposefully, using varied discourse patterns to facilitate classroom interaction, prompt learners' thinking and engagement, and gauge learners' understanding. They should ask probing, referential questions to promote higher-order thinking, allowing enough waiting time for students to contemplate, discuss and prepare before giving the answers. Finally, teachers should allow students to ask questions about what is under study and what they are not clear about. Only in this way, can teachers be more responsive to learner needs and understandings. Based on the analysis in this section, the degree to which teachers' practices are aligned with learner-centred practices is mapped out in Table 6.4.

Table 6.4 Alignment of teachers' practices with learner-centredness – Questioning

Interaction and discourse	**Alignment of teacher's practice with Learner-centred practices**			
	Hardly	A little	Some extent	Great extent
Questioning	F G	C D E	A B	

Legend: A – Anli; B – Bailin; C – Chen; D – Dongmei; E – Enya; F – Fang; G – Guiyun

Overall, Anli's and Bailin's practices regarding questioning are to some extent aligned with learner-centred practices. They not only frequently asked questions to engage learners in the learning process, but also used varied discourse patterns, Anli frequently used follow-up moves, which effectively facilitated learning and thinking and Bailin frequently used student-initiated questioning to facilitate learning. However, they did not allow very much wait time, although longer than others, for students to think and

prepare, and only occasionally asked higher-order thinking questions. Furthermore, Anli only occasionally used student-initiated questioning and Bailin did not use follow-up moves. In comparison, Chen's, Dongmei's and Enya's practices are only to a little degree aligned with learner-centred practices. They asked questions less frequently than Anli and Bailin and also only occasionally asked higher-order thinking questions. Dongmei used varied discourse patterns to facilitate learning. Fang's and Guiyun's practices are not aligned with learner-centredness, as they did not ask questions frequently, but rather were themselves talking a large proportion of the time. They relied on a certain discourse pattern heavily, did not provide much time for students to think and prepare, nor did they ask students to initiate questions.

The questioning features a teacher used highly influenced how interactive the class was and how active the students were. By frequently asking questions and allowing some discussing and thinking time, Anli and Bailin engaged students in active thinking, responding and participation. The less questioning going on and the less wait time provided, the less likely the students were to be engaged in the learning process, as was evident in Fang's and Guiyun's classes. This practice deprived students of the opportunity to think about and to contemplate the questions and new information. Therefore, while the knowers always know the answers, the ones who do not know are not given time to think for themselves or seek help from others, thus are either provided with the correct answers or risk failing to answer the questions or do the activities. The possibility for them to succeed in answering or carrying out work independently became lower, which may have intimidated some students and resulted in a sense of low-efficacy and unwillingness to participate or learn overall.

Regarding students' initiation of questions, only Bailin frequently and Anli on one occasion asked students to reflect and initiate questions about what they still do not understand. The other teachers did not ask students to initiate questions, perhaps presuming that what is taught is learnt by the student. However, learning is not about what the teacher thinks that the students have learnt and understood, but what the

students have actually learnt and understood. Therefore, from a learner-centred perspective, allowing student-initiated questions enables teachers to gauge student's thinking so as to teach more responsively to students' understanding.

The discourse patterns a teacher used associated students with certain ways of learning, which thus may influence the effectiveness of the learning and teaching process. For example, Fang's heavy reliance on the I-N-R-(F) pattern may constrain learning opportunities. She sometimes only showed the question on the data projector for students to look at and then provided word-length answers, not expecting students to say the whole sentence aloud. This practice minimized students' learning and practice opportunities, which was likely to promote 'deaf-mute' learning of the language. Relying heavily on the I-R-(F) pattern might have resulted in students' disengagement or non-response, as observed in Guiyun's class. While the nomination-question pattern (N-I-R-F) has the function of testing/checking whether an individual student has understood or remembered what was intended, using it to excess as Enya did might minimize students' thinking and engagement, causing a sense of insecurity. The students sometimes seemed to be at a loss when nominated to answer a question unprepared. Therefore, they were less likely to succeed in answering the questions and might develop a sense of low-efficacy and gradually lose confidence and be demotivated. When this pattern was used, if the students did not know the answer, they were allowed no time or opportunity to think about the answer and even seek help. It is also likely that only the very student that was nominated would pay attention to the question asked. Another possible drawback is that the pattern may make the students feel nervous if they do not even know what the question is when they are called on to answer.

Whether a pattern is facilitative depends on how and how much it is used. For example, the way the N-I-R-F pattern is used by Anli and Bailin led to different effects. They only occasionally used this pattern when they felt the students were more prepared or capable of answering the questions, with a purpose to check on students' understanding

(Bailin) and to give students an opportunity to act as 'little teachers' (Anli). More importantly, whether teachers had follow-up moves after a traditional I-R-F pattern and its variations made a great difference. By making good use of the third feedback position in I-R-F with follow-up moves, Anli enabled the exchange sequence to serve 'a good pedagogical function' (Waring, 2009, p. 3). By using follow-up moves frequently, Anli effectively engaged the whole class in the learning process, 'seizing the moment' to expand students' opportunity to practice the sentences or use the language in authentic or meaningful ways.

This section analysed teachers' practices regarding questioning, an important aspect of classroom interaction and discourse. Another important aspect closely related to teacher questioning is giving feedback and error correction, as addressed in the next section.

6.3 Feedback and error correction

The previous two sections have provided an insight into the interaction patterns and questioning features of each teacher's classes. This section focuses on teachers' practices regarding giving feedback and error correction. Four forms of giving feedback and error correction are identified: 1) teacher feedback and correction, 2) peer correction, 3) peer feedback and 4) self-correction. Teachers' use of each form is summarized in Table 6.5. Teacher feedback and error correction, including peer correction, are used by all teachers to varying degrees. Peer feedback was used by only two teachers and self-correction was by only one.

Table 6.5 Feedback and error correction

Feedback and error correction	Anli	Bailin	Chen	Dongmei	Enya	Fang	Guiyun
Teacher feedback and/or correction	Y+	Y+	Y	Y	Y-	Y	Y
Peer feedback	Y+						Y
Peer correction	Y-	Y	Y-	Y	Y-	Y-	Y
Self-correction			Y				

Legend: Y = the feature was used by a teacher; Y+ = the feature was used by a teacher more frequently; Y- = the feature was used by a teacher less frequently; N = the feature was not used by a teacher

6.3.1 Teacher feedback and/or correction

Teacher feedback and/or correction was frequently given by Anli and Bailin, while rarely given by Enya. The other teachers were in between. Anli gave positive feedback and a big hand after students answered a question or gave a presentation (for example, see Excerpt 5.14). Bailin frequently gave encouraging and caring feedback, attending to individual students' progress (see Excerpt 6.12).

Excerpt 6.12 Bailin Y7 L3

T: Ok, now, look at 1A, 1A, [have you found it? Good! Did you listen to the words yesterday at home?]
STs: Yes!
T: Good, I am going to find someone to teach us how to pronounce the words.
…
T: ST9 (ST9 raising his hand), nine
ST9: nine, nine, 9, 9
STs: nine, nine, 9, 9
T: [Very good! (Did you) notice ST9's change? He was very shy yesterday, but today he volunteered to stand up! This is very good!] Very good …

Bailin gave specific comments on the change in a student after the student volunteered to stand up and lead the class to read the word 'nine'. For another example (Excerpt 6.13), after explaining the possible three answers for the question asking about someone's name, Bailin gave Student 2 an opportunity to provide an answer to the question 'What is her name?':

Excerpt 6.13 Bailin Y7 L2

T: Ok, we should have no problems with question number 3 right? ST2, which answer is missing for the third question? (What's her name)?

ST2: The answer 'Mary' is missing.

T: [Eh, yes! Sit down please!] Sit down please! [See? You can also learn! Do not look down upon yourself!]

ST2 was able to give the right answer, and then Bailin seized the opportunity to give encouragement for Student 2 to build up self-confidence.

By contrast, Enya did not give feedback, encouragement, praise or express her feelings, regardless of whether students had done or said something well or poorly. Excerpt 6.14 is an example when some students were asked to come to the front and introduce their family members according to the picture they had just drawn.

Excerpt 6.14 Enya Y7 L4

ST1: This is my mother. This is my father. This is my grandfather. This is my grandmother. This is my brother. This is my sister, this is my . . . (inaudible) (ST1 speaks fluently)

T: Ok, thank you. ST2

ST2: Hello, I am ST2. My father is Mike, My mother is Linda. (noisy)

T: Hush! Hush!

ST2: My sister is Tina. This is my friend Li Ming and Wang Feng. Thank you.

…

ST4: Oh, My name is ST4. This is my mother. Her name is Mary. This is my father. He name

T: He name? He name?

ST4: Oh, his name is Mike

STs: Mike, [Mike] (laughter)

ST4: Er, Er, he is my brother. His name is, Er, Er, Bob. This is my friend. He, his name is Zhang Peng. Thanks, Bye-bye. (students' laughter)

T: ST5!

Throughout this process, Enya just moved on without giving any feedback or comments except for recasting ST4's mistake. Even when ST1 did so well that the other students clapped hands involuntarily, Enya did not make any comment or feedback.

For another example (see Excerpt 6.15), Enya asked students to introduce some people in a picture in the textbook, presuming they were the speaker in the picture.

Excerpt 6.15 Enya Y7 L2

T: ST1, [please introduce A]

ST1: That is my mom.
…
T: [Please introduce C] (pointing to ST3)
ST3: C. That is my grandmother.
STS: (laughing, as C is a man))
T: C, C
STs: (laughing)
T: [Please introduce E] (pointing to ST4)
ST4: That is my …

Enya did not give ST3 an opportunity to correct himself, but just quickly moved on.

The other four teachers (Chen, Dongmei, Fang, Guiyun) generally provided some feedback and/or correction to the student. Dongmei is average, however, she rarely gave any feedback or comments after students' presentations in the everyday class report section (see Section 5.7.2), forming a striking contrast with Anli in this respect.

6.3.2 Peer feedback

Peer feedback was only used by two – Anli and Guiyun. Anli used it frequently. For example, every day after the students' presentation called 'class report', Anli engaged students in peer feedback in which the students really gave meaningful and constructive feedback to the speaker(s) (see Excerpts 5.27 & 28). Guiyun occasionally also asked students to give feedback to others, but the process was not effective (see Excerpt 6.16).

Excerpt 6.16 Guiyun Y9 L4

T: [Ok, let's have a look! Let's first find some mistakes, and then point out what aspects are well-written. Please express your own views! Let's see whether we can find some mistakes. Be brave, have a try!] (T raising hand) Can you find any?
STs: (Nobody raising hands)
T: [Do I have to nominate? We need to change this habit (of not volunteering). Is it already written very well and there are no problems?]
STs: No.

The fact that Guiyun unusually asked students to point out mistakes in the student's composition might have felt threatening to the students, as in collectivist societies like China it is not a norm to criticise others but to maintain harmony and save face for the group members (Joy & Kolb, 2009). This may explain why the students were not

willing to volunteer or make comments. Guiyun then asked students to point out good things about the composition, but they still did not open their mouths. In the end, Guiyun was the one mainly to remark on the compositions.

6.3.3 Peer correction

Peer correction is used by all the participants, but more frequently used by Bailin, Dongmei and Guiyun. Guiyun's class is taken as an example. In Excerpt 6.17, when the first two students cannot answer the question why 'ing' should be added to 'admire' and 'share' after 'of', she asked the whole class whether anyone can help them, rather than giving the answers directly.

Excerpt 6.17 Guiyun Y9 L1

T: After this, people started the tradition of admiring the moon and sharing mooncakes. [Now I have some question to ask … First, there is a phrase] admiring the moon and sharing mooncakes,

…

T: [First, let's take these two phrases out, should we add] -ing? Admire the moon and share the mooncakes], [Now I ask you, ST1, why do we add] -ing?

ST1: (Cannot answer)

T: ST2,

ST2: (Cannot answer)

T: Eh, [who can help these two?]

STs: [We use gerund after propositions]

T: [What about after verbs?]

STs: -ing

T: [Can we use verbs?]

STs: [No.]

T: Ok, sit down please!

…

The whole class responded and gave the answer saying that after the preposition 'of', the gerund should be used. Guiyun engaged the whole class in thinking about the reasons by inviting them to help the first two. For another example, in Excerpt 6.18, when ST4 could not change the sentence from direct speech to indirect speech, Guiyun asked other students to help.

Excerpt 6.18 Guiyun Y9 L?

ST4: Er, he, he said, he said . . .
T: [Anyone can help? Someone has difficulties.] ST5
ST5: Er, he said that he has (1st: gone) go to America,
1ST: has been to
ST5: has been to America
T: he said that he
ST5: has
T: has
ST5: been
T: has been. . . to America
T: [Any different ideas?]
ST6: has been
T: Er, ST6, ST5 has changed the pronouns and the verb to 'that he has been to America'. ST6, what about you?
ST6: [Change] has [into] had
T: [Change] has [into] had, why?
ST6: [Because the mainly clause uses past tense, so the subordinate clauses should use past tense.]
T: Agree with her or agree with him? [Do you agree with her or him?]
STs: Her.

Rather than giving answers or feedback straight away, Guiyun let students think about answers, correcting each other's answers, and indicating whether they agreed or disagreed with others.

6.3.4 Self-correction

Self-correction is a feature identified only in Chen's class. For example, in Excerpt 6.19, Chen gave opportunity for a student to correct his own errors.

Excerpt 6.19 Chen Y7 L1

T: Ok, now, let's check our answers. [Let's check our answers]. Ok, No.1, parent, parents, yes, or no?
STs: Yes.
…
T: Ok, No. 7.
STs: No, no!
T: Who? Who? [Whose answer it is?]
STs: ST7's.
T: [(ST7), another opportunity for you, could you tell us the answer?]
ST7: [Change the letter Y into 'i' and then add 'as']

T: [Which rule it is?]

Excerpt 6.20 is another example when Chen asked some students to write the plural forms of some words on the blackboard while the others wrote in their exercise books, she moved around to supervise and check the answers and some students gave her the exercise to check.

Excerpt 6.20 Chen L2 Y7

T: Nos. 2 and 4 [are wrong].
T: [You too, Nos. 2 and 4 have problem, 2, 4, 6, 7 (have problem)]
T: [Nos. 2, 3, 7 have problem, 2, 3, 7]
T: man
T: [No.7]
T: [Nos. 2, 4, and 7]

Rather than giving answers directly, Chen indicated which one was wrong, letting students think and correct the mistakes for themselves.

6.3.5 Summary

In summary, teacher feedback was provided frequently and effectively by Anli and Bailin, forming a sharp contrast with Enya, who consistently did not give any feedback, except for error correction purposes. The other teachers were in between, among whom, Dongmei generally provided feedback except for the activity of 'class report'. Peer feedback was only used by Anli and Guiyun, with Anli using it more efficiently than Guiyun. Peer correction was used more frequently by Bailin, Dongmei and Guiyun than others. Self-correction was not observed among the teachers apart from Chen.

Learner-centred teachers use various forms of feedback and correction effectively to facilitate learning, for example, self-correction, peer-correction and feedback, and teacher correction and feedback. Bearing this in mind, the degree to which the seven teachers' practices regarding feedback and error correction aligned with learner-centredness is summarized in Table 6.6.

Table 6.6 Alignment of teachers' practices with learner-centredness – Feedback and error correction

Interaction and discourse	Alignment of teachers' practices with learner-centredness			
	Hardly	A little	Some extent	Great extent
Feedback and error correction		E F	C D G	A B

Legend: A – Anli; B – Bailin; C – Chen; D – Dongmei; E – Enya; F – Fang; G – Guiyun

Overall, Anli's and Bailin's practices were to a great extent aligned with learner-centred practices. They not only frequently gave encouraging and specific feedback to the students, but also frequently engaged students in giving feedback to their peers (Anli) and peer correction (Bailin). Chen's, Dongmei's and Guiyun's practices were to some degree learner-centred. They all frequently used teacher feedback and/or correction, sometimes used peer correction (Dongmei and Guiyun), occasionally used peer feedback (Guiyun) and sometimes used self-correction (Chen). The practices of the other two teachers, Enya and Fang, are only to a little degree learner-centred. Both of them only occasionally used peer correction. Enya consistently did not give feedback to students, regardless of whether they had done well or not.

The features of giving feedback and error correction greatly influenced the students' learning process. For example, the use of self-correction (Chen) promoted students' independent thinking and problem-solving; the use of peer feedback (Anli) and teacher feedback (Anli, Bailin) effectively engaged students in the learning process, promoting active thinking, participation and reflection. In contrast, the constrained feedback by the teacher or peers in Enya's class resulted in the observed passive learning and disengagement of the students. The issue is how to seize opportunities to encourage students to improve, support them to be successful and thereby give positive reinforcement. Only in this way can those students who did not do well in study change for the better and the class climate become more positive. If teachers strictly pursue their teaching agenda rather than sensitively building on students' contributions, the

space for learning will be narrowed (Marton & Tsui, 2004).

This section has analyzed teachers' practices regarding giving feedback and error correction, thus adding to the understanding of the classroom interaction and discourse that is facilitated in the classrooms. Another important aspect is the turn allocation patterns and features in the classes which determine who is given the opportunity to speak and participate in the interaction. This is the focus of the next section.

6.4 Turn allocation

Turn allocation features were another aspect of classroom interaction in the observed 35 classes (summarized in Table 6.7). The three prominent turn-allocation patterns were identified in terms of whether the teachers allocated turns equally or randomly/ predictably, and whether they incorporated student nominations. Bailin was the only teacher who provided nearly equal opportunity to students and who asked students to nominate other students. Regarding randomness of turn allocation, most teachers tended to allocate turns randomly, although Chen and Enya used predictable turn allocations frequently, especially when dealing with homework and exam papers. The details are presented in this section.

Table 6.7 Turn allocation features

Turn allocation	Anli	Bailin	Chen	Dongmei	Enya	Fang	Guiyun
Equal opportunity	Y-	Y	Y-	N	Y-	N	N
Student nomination		Y					
Predictability	Y-	N	Y+	Y-	Y+	Y-	Y-

Legend: Y= the feature was used by a teacher; Y+= the feature was used by a teacher more frequently; Y- = the feature was used by a teacher less frequently; N= the feature was not used by a teacher

6.4.1 Equal turn allocation

Giving equal opportunity for turns was a feature only identified in Bailin's practice. Bailin's turn allocation was even and spread out, not only the ones raising hands were

called upon, but others. The follow three excerpts (Excerpts 6.21−23) are examples to illustrate Bailin's turn allocation feature.

Excerpt 6.21 Bailin Y7 L1

T: [Those who didn't raise your hands and stand up to show yourself need to catch up, as most students have already stood up, (some) a few times, right? Only a few students were sitting there quietly. To learn English, we need to speak more and practice more! Come on!]

Excerpt 6.22 Bailin Y7 L1

T: [ST1, you haven't raised up your hand for a turn to answer questions, have you? ST2 as well! What about this group? ST3 and ST4 haven't, right?]

ST3& ST4: Yes.

T: [Later on raise your hands, be more active, aren't you two too nervous? Don't be nervous!]

Excerpt 6.23 Bailin Y7 L1

T: [Question No.2, I am a teacher. Question No.2. Just a minute, I will ask these few students who have never raised their hands. ST3!]

ST3: She is a girl.

STs: Girl

T: Ok, [she didn't see this word clearly!] She is a girl. Ok, sit down, please, she is a girl. [What's the Chinese meaning?] What's the Chinese meaning? What's the Chinese meaning? She is a girl, Chinese meaning.

…

T: Ok, next question, ST4, [you have never stood up so far.]

ST4: Her name is Jones.

. . .

Bailin not only encouraged all the students to be active and seize the opportunity to answer questions and practice English but really paid attention to who had not had a turn yet.

By contrast, other teachers tended to allocate turns to students who raised their hands. Among them, Anli, Chen and Enya gave turns to more students than Dongmei, Fang and Guiyun, who tended to allocate turns to just a few students. Taking Guiyun's class as an example, she once asked one student to explain all 10 questions, not involving others in the conversation (see Excerpt 24).

Excerpt 6.24 Guiyun Y9 L5

ST1: [No.41, I choose ‘B’, because …]
T: [Oh, yes, the correct answer if B, ‘her’. She (ST1) has told you where it comes from.] Go on
ST1: No.42 [I was wrong at first, I have changed to ‘A’]
T: A [is an proposition],
ST1: [for the meaning of accompanying]
T: [Ah, yes, means companionship, so choose ‘with’, correct! The answer for No.42 is ‘A’.]
ST1: then I choose ‘C’ for No.43]

The learning and participation opportunities here were constrained or limited because most students listened passively, did not need to think actively as they were not asked to respond and it seemed not their business at all.

6.4.2 Student nomination

Student nomination is a feature only identified in Bailin’s class (see Excerpt 6.25).

Excerpt 6.25 Bailin Y7 L1

T: ST6, please!
ST6: What’s your name?
ST7: My name is ST6.
ST6: Hi ST7!
ST7: Hi ST6!
T: [Anything else?]
ST6: Nice to meet you
T: [Right,] Nice to meet you
ST7: Nice to meet you too.
T: [Very good! Ok,] ST6 please (nominate the next student)
ST6: ST8
T: [Shouldn’t we nominate a boy?]
ST6: ST9!
T: ST9, please.
. . .

Instead of nominating students solely by herself, Bailin involved students in nominating the next student to carry on the activity of demonstrating the dialogue the students had made in pairs and practiced.

6.4.3 Predictability in turn allocation

Predictability in turn allocation is a prominent feature of some teachers' classes or some activities. For example, most of the time teachers nominated students who raised their hand, except for Bailin. Cheng and Enya relied heavily on a predictable turn allocation by asking students to stand up one by one, group-by-group to give the answer to a question each, spelling the words or translating the phrase, to read a dialogue in pairs or groups of three starting from one group (Enya L1 28:00-36:00; L4 7:20-20:25).

Excerpt 6.26 is an example of Enya's class when the students took turns to stand up and give an answer each to an exercise question they did the day before in the exercise book.

Excerpt 6.26 Enya Y7 L1

T: [Ok, let's look at] Self Check. [Self-Check]. ST3, [Let's start from you], (Part One) 120, 120.
ST3: one two zero
T: One two zero, sit down. ST4, 114
ST4: one one four
T: ST5
ST5: one one nine
T: one one nine, ST6
ST6: 18 …
…
T: [Part Two, the first one.]
ST9: [The answer is] C, . . . (inaudible)
T: ST10
ST10: [The second is] what's your name. [I choose] A, I am Cheng Hai.
T: [Ok, correct, the first chose] C, [the second chose] A. ST11.
…

Enya used this form of interaction for nearly 35 minutes. The students stood up one-by-one to give an answer, while Enya sometimes stopped them and explained or clarified. She did not vary the interaction pattern and the students were observed to be disengaged. There was no challenge to those who were not giving the answers. The students might have only cared about the question that they would receive on their turn while ignoring what the others were saying.

Excerpt 6.27 is another example of Enya's class. After students worked in pairs to have conversations about the pictures projected on the screen, Enya asked students to stand up and make a dialogue pair by pair.

Excerpt 6.27 Enya Y7 L3

T: [Ok, work in pairs.] Who's she? Who's he. Who are they?
STs: (working in pairs practicing the conversation)
T: Stop here, [We do not need much time to prepare, right?] ST4!
ST4: Who are they?
ST5: They are her grandparents.
ST4: Who is he?
ST5: He is her father.
T: Sit down!
ST6: Who is she?
ST7: She is her mother.
ST6: Who are they?
ST7: They are her parents.
T: Sit down! ST8
…

Nearly all the students had a turn to stand up from group to group and practice the conversation. However, they were speaking in such a low voice that those students sitting further from them would not be able to hear clearly. Instead of asking the speakers to speak up for the whole class to hear clearly, Enya stood close to the speakers so as to hear them herself. Enya did not give any comments nor did she ask other students to give any comments about the speakers. Thus, at any moment, the teacher was only interacting with two students. The majority of students were observed to be not listening carefully to the two speakers. It seemed none of their business unless they were about to stand up.

In contrast, rather than having predictable turn allocation, teachers who used more random turn allocation seemed to arouse more interest and curiosity among the students, especially in the case of Bailin, Anli and Dongmei. The students seemed to be more intrinsically motivated as they were observed to participate actively with enthusiasm. What follows is an example of how Bailin organized a whole class activity effectively

(see Excerpt 6.28).

Excerpt 6.28 Bailin Y 7 L3

T: 3C name games

…

T: Let's have a look at the four pictures. There are four people and they are a group. [The first says:] 'My name is Bill'. [The second] 'Her name is Gill. My name is Linda … [The Fourth]

T& STs: 'His name is Bill … My name is Grace. '

T: [There are only four people in a group, right? We will have eight in a group, eight!] (STs started discussion)

T: [Ok, we will have one group to demonstrate, get ready!].

T: Ok! Stop! Be quiet! … If we do it group-by-group, then I am afraid we will not be able to go home by12:30. So we will only have one group, but the rule is simple: I will nominate the group members.]

STs: Oh, (raising hands, excited)

T: [I will nominate someone. You keep record and get ready for it! I am not sure how many people will be called on, maybe 8, maybe 10, maybe 15, understand? Keep quiet! Pay attention! Ok, the first one, ST1]

ST1: My name is ST1.

T: T: Very good, sit down please. [Ok, he has already finished!] 'My name is ST1'. ST2

ST2: His name is ST1, My name is ST2.

…

ST3: His name is ST1, his name is ST2, my name is ST3

T: Very good, sit down please. [Pay attention, someone is looking at the book to see how to do this game, but what if I call you and there are 15 people before you?]

STs: [Wo!]

…

T: [Ok, a big hand for those who just stood up!],

STs: (Clapping hands)

The game lasted for about eight minutes but all the students were engaged and excited. By saying that anyone may be called on at any time, Bailin made the turn allocation random and unpredictable, and thus the activity was more challenging and appealing to the students.

6.4.4 Summary

In summary, Bailin not only provided equal turn allocation to the students, but also involved them in allocating the turns. Among the remaining teachers, Anli, Chen and Enya

allocated turns to more students than the other three teachers. Chen and Enya heavily relied on predictable turn allocation patterns. From a learner-centred perspective, teachers should provide equal turn allocation and use varied turn allocation patterns to engage learners in active learning, thinking and participation. The alignment of teachers' practices regarding turn allocation with learner-centred practices is mapped out in Table 6.8.

Table 6.8 Alignment of teachers' practices with learner-centredness – Turn allocation

Interaction and discourse	**Alignment of teachers' practice with learner-centredness**			
	Hardly	A little	Some extent	Great extent
Turn allocation	C D E F G		A	B

Legend: A – Anli; B – Bailin; C – Chen; D – Dongmei; E – Enya; F – Fang; G – Guiyun

Bailin's practices are to a great extent aligned with learner-centred practices. She was the only teacher who provided equal turn allocation and used student nomination. She varied her turn allocation patterns to engage students in active learning and interaction. In comparison, the other teachers had a tendency to allocate turns unevenly, nominating some students, especially the good ones or the ones who raised their hands. Among them, Anli's practices were to some extent aligned with learner-centred practices as she allocated turns to more students and her turn allocation pattern was generally varied and not readily predictable. The other teachers' practices are not aligned with learner-centred practices. Chen and Enya heavily relied on predictable turn allocation to have students stand up one-by-one according to their seating arrangement. Dongmei, Fang and Guiyun tended to only allocate turns to a small group of students.

By using varied and unpredictable turn allocation patterns, Bailin provided students with equal opportunities to participate, speak and share their thinking. In contrast, Chen's and Enya's practice of asking students to stand up and report the answers one by one, question by question, resulted in minimal interaction. This pattern remained the same for a long time − monotonous and disengaging. There were no challenges for nor interactions with those students who were not answering the questions, especially the ones sitting far away from the teacher. This might have resulted in students'

disengagement as observed in Chen's and Enya's classes. Using this pattern, at any given moment, only one or two students were interacting with the teacher, so time-efficiency was low and the process was ineffective in facilitating students' thinking, interaction and learning. The answer−checking process could be made more effective, for example, by using group/pair work, as in Bailin's practice, to facilitate active learning, discussion, noticing, peer scaffolding and teaching.

6.5 Findings and discussion

Building on the understanding of the activities and tasks that were identified in Chapter 5, this chapter explored teachers' practices from another perspective: classroom interaction and discourse. It provided a comprehensive analysis and explanation of teachers' practice regarding classroom interaction and discourse in terms of interaction patterns, questioning, giving feedback and error correction, and turn allocation. The analysis of each aspect leads to the alignment of teachers' practices with learner-centredness, as mapped out in a matrix at the end of each section (see Tables 6.3, 6.5, 6.7, 6.9). To provide an overview of the alignment with learner-centredness of teachers' overall practices regarding classroom interaction and discourse, these matrices are now synthesized into Table 6.9.

Table 6.9 Alignment of teachers' practices with learner-centredness – Interaction and discourse

Interaction and discourse	**Alignment of teachers' practices with learner-centredness**			
	Hardly	A little	Some extent	Great extent
Interaction pattern		F G	C E	A B D
Questioning	F G	C D E	A B	
Feedback and error correction		E F	C D G	A B
Turn allocation	C D E F G		A	B
Overall		E F G	C D	A B

Legend: A – Anli; B – Bailin; C – Chen; D – Dongmei; E – Enya; F – Fang; G – Guiyun

Overall, Anli's and Bailin's practices are to a great extent aligned with learner-centredness. First, they varied interaction patterns and used pair/group work patterns more frequently than others to cater for different learner preferences, maximizing students' opportunities to interact, participate and practice in class. Second, they asked questions frequently with varying discourse patterns to engage learners in active thinking and learning, using student-initiated questioning occasionally (Anli) and frequently (Bailin) to promote students' reflection, gauging students' understanding and learning difficulties. Third, Anli also used peer feedback and follow-up moves frequently to engage the whole class in the interaction, facilitating practice of the sentences or authentic use of the language. Bailin provided students with equal opportunities to participate and answer questions, involving students in nominating other students. Rather than being the centre of the class dominating the class talking time, Anli and Bailin let students 'do' the practicing, learning and thinking, giving frequent and positive feedback. Nevertheless, the absence of student-initiated questioning, the uneven turn allocation and the use of predictable turn allocation in Anli's classes, as well as the short wait time in Anli's and Bailin's classes might compromise the effectiveness to facilitate learning.

By contrast, Enya's, Fang's and Guiyun's practices regarding classroom interaction and discourse are only to a little degree learner-centred. Fang and Guiyun were transmitting knowledge mostly, using a unidirectional interaction pattern. Even though they sometimes asked questions, they stated the answers immediately, not expecting students to respond or leaving time for students to respond. So, most of the time, they dominated the class talking time while students received the information passively. Especially in Fang's class, students' contribution and thinking were limited and the teacher was doing the 'learning' rather than the students. She highly controlled the discourse and the students produced limited responses. In comparison, Enya generally asked questions frequently to engage students in learning and thinking, except when she was dealing with exam papers or exercises. They heavily relied on certain interaction or discourse

patterns, having the tendency to nominate particular students, with Enya relying on a predictable turn allocation pattern. They generally allowed no time or limited wait time for students to think, discuss and prepare for answers. Enya consistently did not give feedback, except for error correction purposes. Guiyun used peer correction and feedback, although not efficiently.

Chen's and Dongmei's practices are in between the others. First, they generally asked questions frequently to engage students in learning and thinking. However, when they were dealing with exam papers or exercises they heavily relied on the T-T pattern and dominated most of the class talking time. Regarding giving feedback, Chen used students' self-correction and Dongmei used peer correction. They generally provided feedback except for Dongmei's practice in the activity of 'class sharing'. They allocated turns unevenly and Chen heavily relied on a predictable turn allocation pattern when dealing with exercises. They did not ask students to initiate questions, nor did they allow enough wait time for students to think, prepare, have peer discussion and support before answering questions.

Thus far, an insight has been provided into what the teachers and students did, how they did it, what they said and what opportunities were there for the students to participate in interactions and to practice or produce English. Each of the features of classroom interaction and discourse discussed in this chapter are interrelated with other features and together they influence the effectiveness of classroom teaching greatly. Generally speaking, all seven teachers gave clear instructions and explanations regarding both content and procedures. However, clarity does not mean effectiveness. The data analysis so far has shown that the effectiveness of a class depends not only on the nature of and kinds of activities used, but more importantly on the organization of the class and the interactions and discourse that take place in the class. The analysis has clearly shown that even using the same activities, the effectiveness of the activities may vary greatly due to the varied interaction and discourse features facilitated by different teachers. Therefore, an activity by name cannot guarantee effectiveness as it has to be

understood with reference to other dimensions of classroom practices, such as classroom interaction and discourse.

A second insight is that, of the five interaction patterns identified, the degree of teacher control decreases from the T-T pattern with the teacher dominating the class talking time, to the pair/group work pattern with students interacting or collaborating with their peers under the teacher's supervision (Harmer, 2015). Each pattern has its functions and thus needs to be used in an integrated way to maximize learning and teaching effectiveness. Heavily relying on a certain pattern, especially the T-T, or the T-WC, may limit students' language input, practice and output, as well as students' opportunity to think, negotiate and discuss, which may result in monotonous classrooms and thus students' disengagement.

A third insight is that the questioning features and feedback and error correction features used by teachers determine whether teachers teach responsively to students' understandings and needs. Whether teachers frequently ask questions, vary their discourse patterns, allow student-initiated questioning and ask higher-order thinking questions, and more importantly, allow enough time for students to discuss, think and prepare answers, all influence the effectiveness of teaching in facilitating active thinking and engagement. Teachers' lack of feedback may hinder the creation of an encouraging and facilitating learning environment, resulting in a perceived meaninglessness of the learning process, demotivating students and causing students' disengagement. Lack of peer feedback and self-correction also deprive students of the opportunity to share, negotiate, think and reflect.

A fourth insight is that the turn allocation patterns in a class also greatly influence opportunities for learning and participation. Using an equal turn allocation and appropriately using unpredictable turn allocation optimizes learning opportunities, while having the tendency to allocate turns to particular students, as many teachers did in this study, and heavily relying on a certain predictable turn allocation results in monotony

and thus student disengagement.

6.6 Chapter summary

This chapter has provided a detailed analysis on teachers' practices regarding classroom interaction and discourse from four aspects: interaction pattern, questioning, giving feedback and error correction, as well as turn allocation. It has provided an insight into the nature of both the verbal and nonverbal interactions taking place in the classes. The analysis revealed the features and patterns of each teacher's practice and how these have facilitated or constrained classroom interaction and the opportunity for students to participate, discuss, think and learn. The alignment of teachers' practices with learner-centredness in this regard has been mapped out in Table 6.9. To provide an even fuller picture of the classroom teaching and learning process, four further aspects of teachers' practices will be explored in the next two chapters. Chapter 7 will focus on teachers' practices regarding: content and resources, assessment, learner thinking and learning strategies, and the classroom learning environment and climate.

Chapter 7 Assessment, content, learner thinking, strategies and classroom environment

The previous four chapters have analyzed and reported teachers' practices regarding classroom activities and tasks (Chapter 5) and classroom interaction and discourse (Chapter 6). This analysis has provided insights regarding the lesson outlines, key components, activities and tasks, and features of the interactions and discourse taking place in the classroom. These insights have laid a foundation for the exploration and analysis of teachers' practices regarding four other dimensions that will be addressed in this chapter. Section 7.1 focuses on assessment, exploring what forms of assessment were used and in what ways learning was facilitated or hindered. Section 7.2 analyzes teachers' practices related to the use of content and resources to uncover how the textbooks, materials and resources were used to facilitate learning. Section 7.3 focuses on the teachers' practices regarding the facilitation of learner thinking and learning strategies to uncover how these were facilitated or constrained by teachers' practices. Section 7.4 analyzes teachers' practices related to the creation of the classroom learning environment and climate. Section 7.5 then connects teachers' beliefs and practices to address the research question: How do teachers practices align with their beliefs?

7.1 Assessment

Based on the assessment practices embedded in the observed classroom teaching processes, four salient features were identified regarding the use of formative assessment and the use of exam results/papers (see Table 7.1). Five teachers used formative assessment to monitor students' performance, progress and behaviour. Among them, one also used formative assessment on the subject content – students' speaking ability, which involves learner control and choices – as well as peer assessment. Two teachers used exam results/papers to promote self-cognition and the

development of test-taking ability. Among them, one also used exam results/papers to promote active learning. These features are explained in detail in this section.

Table 7.1 Features of assessment

Assessment	Anli	Bailin	Chen	Dongmei	Enya	Fang	Guiyun
Use of formative assessment							
• to monitor performance and progress	Y	Y+	Y	Y	Y		
• on subject content	Y						
• involving peer assessment	Y						
• allow learner control and choices	Y						
Use of exam papers/results							
• to promote self-cognition		Y					
• to promote cognition about tests and develop test-taking ability		Y					Y
• to promote active learning and thinking		Y					

Legend: Y= the feature was identified in a teacher's class

7.1.1 Use of formative assessment

A formative assessment system was used by all the five teachers in Xihua Secondary School (Anli, Bailin, Chen, Dongmei, Enya) to monitor students' progress and performance. Students in their classes were awarded scores in accordance with their general performance, such as their general behaviour in school and homework fulfilment. This score accounts for students' overall behaviour scores upon their middle school graduation. Besides the common practice of using the formative assessment mechanism, Bailin demonstrated constantly monitoring students' performance and progress by giving specific and timely comments on individual growth and progress, thereby encouraging the students appropriately (see Excerpt 6.12).

Of the five teachers, only Anli used formative assessment on the subject content, which was to assess students' English speaking ability. This assessment was embedded in the 'class sharing' activity (see Excerpt 5.27), which allowed student control and choice on what to present about, how to present and with whom. Students also had some control over when they would like to do the sharing by volunteering or negotiating with the teacher. At the end of the presentations, Anli used peer assessment when she guided the class to give feedback, evaluating the presentation and giving a score for the presentation. The score contributed to the overall oral exam scores for a school term for the presenter(s).

In summary, all five L2 teachers in Xihua Secondary School were observed to be using a formative assessment system to monitor students' progress and performance. Among them, Bailin constantly monitored students' progress and performance, giving specific feedback on individual students' progress and improvement to further encourage and motivate students. Anli is the only teacher who used formative assessment on the subject content, assessing and evaluating the oral ability of the students, allowing learner control and choice, and involving peer assessment and evaluation.

7.1.2 Use of exam results/papers

Every semester, the students needed to take a school-wide mid-term exam and a district-wide end-of-term exam. The end-of-term exam was mainly used as summative evaluation on teaching and learning. Besides these two exams, the students had a unit test at the end of each unit, the purposes of which were mainly for checking the effects of teaching and learning, to identify weaknesses and problems, and then adjust teaching accordingly. Dealing with unit test papers was a process observed in four teachers' classes (Guiyun, Bailin, Chen, Dongmei). This process had different functions in different classes: to facilitate self-cognition (Bailin), exam-taking ability (Bailin, Guiyun), active learning and thinking (Bailin), and mainly to correct the mistakes (Chen, Dongmei).

The exam result was used by Bailin to facilitate self-cognition. At the beginning, she commented on the average score of the class and how this class compared to other classes. She did all this comparison in a constructive and encouraging/positive manner, rather than trying to disgrace any students (see Excerpt 7.1).

Excerpt 7.1 Bailin Y7 L2

T: [I have informed you about this exam. ST1 has achieved the highest score, a full score of 115, doing all correct including the additional questions. The lowest score in is 63. Right, 63 is the lowest score and the average is 99, right? Now you should be clear about it. The most important is that there are eight students who got a score lower than 80… These students need to pay attention as to what do about the problems, especially when we explain the paper today, listen carefully… OK, our average is higher than Class Three like last time …]

Bailin facilitated students' cognitive understanding of themselves in relation to others in a constructive and encouraging manner.

The exam papers were used by Bailin and Guiyun to develop students' cognition about tests and test-taking ability. For example, Bailin analyzed the test paper by pointing out problems and then asking the students to think about strategies, for example in tackling listening comprehension (see Excerpt 7.2).

Excerpt 7.2 Bailin Y7 L2

T: [We have a few big problems, still old problems. The most serious is the one that we have emphasized even since the first day, that is our writing needs to follow the norms. Your still do not pay attention to distinguish the capital from small letters and the punctuation. The second problem is…]

T: [Ok, let's look at the listening part … Who can tell me what we should do before starting to answer the questions?] ST2

ST2: [We should read all the answers first.]

T: [Read the answers first, right? Ok, I am sure you are able to do it, can't you? But it doesn't not guarantee that you can get a full score,] ST3

ST3: [We should see clearly what they are.]

T: [See clearly what they are, right. Like what we have just said, be more careful, observe carefully]

…

T: [Question five. Some students do not know the words in answer A. What is A?]

STs: [aeroplane]

T: [Aeroplane, how to say aeroplane?] C. . .
T: [We have said before, only in what part will new words appear? Reading comprehension, only in reading comprehension will there be new words. …

Similarly, before the class, Guiyun (see Excerpt 7.3) had already noted down which questions were answered incorrectly by most of the students, in order to emphasize in class. While explaining the questions, she asked students to write down what area each question tests them about. After finishing explaining the questions, Guiyun did statistics with the students to see which kind of aspects were tested more:

Excerpt 7.3 Guiyun Y9 L5

T: [Regarding the multiple choice questions and the cloze questions on the exam paper we did yesterday, let's discuss what is tested about, why we have done wrong, how to improve. Ok, let's start with the first question. Many of you chose] 'for' [for the first question] Er, give something to somebody, [it is a fixed combination] give to, [we are not going to explain it anymore, but now, please write 'preposition on your exam paper'. Later we will see how many questions are testing what points, as we are in Year 9, facing the High School Entrance Examination.]
…
T: [Ok, now, let's look back to see what grammar points are tested from question 21, let's see what each question tests us about.]
…
T: [Testing about the comprehension of sentence meanings?]
…
T: [How many altogether?]
STs: 7 [scores]
T: [Good! What else? Sentence pattern and fixed combinations, together?]
. . .
[Based on what we have calculated, these points are the most frequently tested], am I right?
STs: Yes
T: Well, inferring the meaning based on the context is often tested, therefore, understanding the (different) meanings of words is
T& Important.
STs: It is important to read aloud the reading comprehension passages, putting (the words)
T: in the context and reading aloud is important, but it is what we are afraid of doing, right? So we just do not do it, and now you cannot stand the test.

Based on the statistics, Guiyun then drew a conclusion with the students that they should do more reading aloud to understand the meaning of words in context. Besides,

she also reinforced exam-taking strategies such as how to tackle cloze questions (Excerpt 7.4).

Excerpt 7.4 Guiyun Y9 L5

T: [When you do the first question, did you first read through the whole passage?]
STs: [Yes!]
T: [Did you do it carefully while reading the second time?]
STs: [Yes!]
T: [Did you read for a third time to check your answers?]
STs: [No!]
T: [That's explains why. I was wondering why you did so badly. I simply couldn't believe. What about now, after your correction yesterday?]
STs: [Better!]
T: [You improved it right? You have corrected quite some mistakes right?]
STs: [Yes!]

In this way, Guiyun asked questions to evoke reflection and thereby reinforce the strategies to tackle cloze questions, helping students identify what step is missing, which helped to explain why they did worse than they should be able to.

Using exam papers to facilitate active learning and thinking was a feature identified in Bailin's class only. Bailin did not spend time explaining the paper question by question, but asked students to give the answers, say what they did not understand, and then ask other students to explain. She only explained when no students could explain (see Excerpt 7.5).

Excerpt 7.5 Bailin Y7 L2

T: [Who can tell us the correct answers from 41 to 45? Ok, ST1]
ST1: ACBBC
T: [OK, sit down please! 41 [to] 45 ACBBC. [Clear? Ok, be quick if you have questions] ST2(hand rising)
ST2: [questions 41 and 44]
T: [Ok, 41 and 44, who can explain 41? Ok, our subject representative ST3 is raising her hand. ST3 please!]
ST3: [Question 41, it is a girl, girl begins with a vowel, oh, sorry, it doesn't begin with an vowel, so we need to use 'a ', therefore we need to say a girl, so the answer is A …
T: [Ok, question 44. Who can explain? ST4]
ST4: [44, because] she [is a third person single, so need to use the third person single form

of the verb.

T: [Ok, ST4 has given a complete answer, but …]

In this process of explaining the exam paper, the students were taking an active role, doing the learning and thinking.

By contrast, Chen, Dongmei and Guiyun were mainly talking and explaining mistakes, only occasionally asking students to give the answer and explain why. Even though the teachers asked questions, they were merely rhetorical questions since they provided answers themselves using the T-T interaction pattern (for an example, see Excerpt 6.1). Although the teachers explained clearly, expanding as appropriate, the students were mainly passively listening to the teachers, busy taking notes and correcting mistakes, rarely responding to them.

In summary, dealing with exam papers was identified in four teachers' classes, where they each treated and used the exam results/papers differently. Bailin and Guiyun used these to facilitate students' cognition about tests as well as develop their abilities and strategies in dealing with different questions. Bailin also facilitated students' self-cognition regarding how they compared with others, in a constructive way. More importantly, she engaged students in telling answers and explaining the exam paper while the other three teachers mainly dominated the talking time, telling and explaining to the students.

7.1.3 Findings and discussion

Learner-centred teachers use various forms of assessment to facilitate learning, allowing learner control and choices. The analysis of the data related to assessment revealed varying degrees to which teachers' practices are aligned with learner-centred criteria. The alignment of teachers' practices with learner-centredness is mapped out in Table 7.2, followed by a summary of the evidence presented in the previous sections.

Table 7.2 Alignment of teachers' practices with learner-centredness – Assessment

Categories of teacher practices	Alignment with learner-centred practices			
	Hardly	A little	Some extent	Great extent
Assessment	F	C D E G		A B

Legend: A – Anli; B – Bailin; C – Chen; D – Dongmei; E – Enya; F – Fang; G – Guiyun

Anli's and Bailin's practices are to a great extent aligned with learner-centredness. They both used a formative assessment mechanism for student behaviour and class management. Bailin constantly monitored students' progress and provided timely and specific feedback and encouragement to individual students. Bailin also used the exam paper to facilitate students' active learning, thinking and reflection, with an emphasis on the development of exam-taking skills, students' self-cognition and cognition about the exams. Anli incorporated formative assessment on students' English speaking ability, allowing students freedom of choice, involving students in peer assessment.

In comparison, Chen's, Dongmei's and Enya's practices were to a little degree learner-centred as they all used a formative evaluation and assessment mechanism for behaviour and class management as required by the school. Guiyun's practices were also to a little degree learner-centred as she used exam papers to facilitate students' reflection and test-taking ability. Noticeably, not enough evidence was available to suggest that Fang's practices in this regard were at all aligned with learner-centred practices.

All five teachers in Xihua Secondary School were observed to be using a formative assessment system to monitor students' progress and performance, as required by the school, while the two teachers in the other school did not. This points to an organizational difference between the two schools. The finding implies that the policy advocacy of formative assessment has not been implemented in Yizhi Secondary School yet, despite being situated in the same city as Xihua Secondary School. However, although all the five teachers in Xihua Secondary School were observed to be using a

formative assessment system, the main purpose was for administration and class management rather than for learning. Bailin and Anli were two exceptional teachers in this regard. Bailin constantly monitored students' progress and provided students with timely and specific feedback and encouragement, while Anli incorporated formative assessment on the content areas in her everyday practice, incorporating peer assessment, allowing learner control and choices.

Regarding the exam papers and results, of the four teachers observed dealing with exam papers, Chen and Dong mainly gave the correct answers for students to correct their mistakes. However, Bailin and Guiyun used these for learning, especially Bailin, who made full use of the exam papers and results to maximize the students' opportunities to reflect, think, learn and develop their ability to deal with exams.

Regarding norm- or criterion-referenced evaluation, a concern was raised in Section 4.6.5 regarding whether Bailin's belief would lead to a negative influence on the students, as she maintained that students need to know their competitive ranking, a seemingly contradictory view to the learner-centred philosophy. However, the finding shows that she conducted this comparison in a positive tone, conveying an encouraging rather than negative attitude towards students who did not do well. The social reality is that students will face competition in society, and Bailin brought this reality to the students. What is crucial is her constructive attitudes and approach in doing it.

This section has analyzed teachers' assessment practices, mapping out the alignment of these practices with learner-centredness. The next section will continue to add to the picture of teachers' practice from the perspective of teachers' use of content and resources.

7.2 Content and resources

The seven teachers generally used a wide range of resources to support learning, including PowerPoint (PPT) slides, video and audio inputs, and resource books

accompanying the textbooks. However, the ways they used the text books and the resources differed (see Table 7.3). Some adapted the textbooks or exercises books and accompanying supporting resources to be more meaningful and relevant and developmentally appropriate (Anli, Bailin) while others did minimum adaptation. Some teachers used media as content for the development of students' thinking and learning skills and overall ability, rather than merely as something to be covered (Anli, Bailin, Chen, Dongmei). The details are explained in the following subsections.

Table 7.3 Content and resources

Content and resources	Anli	Bailin	Chen	Dongmei	Enya	Fang	Guiyun
Richness of resources and input • Using various inputs to enrich learning and discussion	Y+	Y	Y	Y	Y+	Y	Y+
Function of the content • Media for developing thinking, learning and overall ability, rather merely covering knowledge.	Y	Y		Y-			
Adaptation of textbooks and resources • Adapting textbooks and supporting resources (PPT slides) to be more meaningful and relevant and developmentally appropriate	Y	Y		Y			

Legend: Y = the type of activities was used by a teacher; Y- = the type of activities was used by a teacher less frequently

7.2.1 Richness of resources and input

The most commonly used sources of teaching input were exercise and resource books prescribed by the school, and PPT slides and audio recordings accompanying the textbook or resource book. Besides these sources, Anli, Enya and Guiyun also used other resources and/or input. These included students' presentations (Anli), students' compositions (Guiyun), and video clips (Enya, Guiyun).

Anli used students' presentations and answers as input resources for discussion. She even invited students from another class to give a presentation, after which she used the presentation as an input and resource for discussion and learning (see Section 5.7.2). Guiyun also used a student's composition as an input resource for discussion and peer correction (see Section 6.3.2). Guiyun and Enya both used video clips, but in different ways. Guiyun showed a video clip about how Halloween is celebrated throughout the world, which led to discussion about Halloween; Enya showed a short video clip which introduced the Disney movie (*The Lion King*) in English. However, she did not engage the students with the video clip.

In summary, all the teachers used a variety of inputs and resources to support learning, with Anli, Enya and Guiyun above average, especially Anli, who used these in a way to make learning more interesting, meaningful and/or authentic. Enya's use of video clips did not add to teaching effectiveness in this regard.

7.2.2 Adaptation of the textbook and resources

Textbooks and supporting resources were adapted by three teachers to be meaningful, relevant and developmentally appropriate to students (Anli, Bailin, Dongmei). For example, Anli modified the PPT slides, making the words large enough for the students to see clearly, inserting some slides occasionally to make them more appropriate for her students, adjusting the sequences of questions to make the reading comprehension more accessible. She also modified the requirements of the activities in books to make them more relevant and interesting to her students – as, for example, in the following textbook activity.

> Textbook activity 2a. Rank these activities according to how often you think your classmates do them (1 = most often, 6 = least often).
> watch TV, go to the movies, play computer games, exercise or play sports, use the internet, go camping in the country

She asked students to write the frequencies for each activity with the relevant frequency adverbs, then she asked some individual students questions to model questioning and

answering, such as ‘How often do you watch TV?’. Then, she modified the question to become ‘How often does she watch TV?’ and directed the question to the whole class. Next, she asked students to work in pairs to ask and answer similar questions. This adaptation made learning authentic, relevant and thus interesting to students, as evidenced by their active engagement.

Similarly, Bailin also modified and designed the PPT to be interesting and relevant. For example, she included a picture of her own car in the PPT when teaching numbers and engaging students in meaningful use and practice of numbers. Rather than following the steps and tasks in the textbook to cover the content, she used a wide range of activities or adapted the activities to facilitate learning in more meaningful and authentic ways. For example, asking names in pairs and groups (see Excerpt 5.33) and the whole class name game (see Excerpt 6.28).

Dongmei incorporated a listening activity to teaching dialogue (a speaking activity) (see Excerpt 5.24), which is not required by the textbook. In so doing, she used the textbook and resources (the audio recording) to engage students in meaningful discussion about the topic. Here, her concern went beyond covering the content of the textbook. However, the others used the PPT as it was, and she herself did not make the change to enlarge the words for students at the back to see clearly.

In summary, Anli, Bailin and Dongmei adapted the textbook and/or the supporting resources (PPT slides) to be meaningful, relevant and developmentally appropriate to students, while the other four teachers mainly followed the steps of the textbooks and used the supporting resources as they were.

7.2.3 Function of content

Using content as a media to teach for real understanding and students’ ability development was a feature of three teachers’ practice (Anli, Bailin, Dongmei). For example, when teaching new words, Anli engaged the students in active learning and sharing of their thinking and understanding rather than telling and covering the new

words quickly (see Section 5.3). Anli and Dongmei made effective use of the reading passage to facilitate the development of students' reading skills and ability. Anli (see Section 5.5) first asked questions to evoke students' interest and curiosity. Then she asked students to guess the content according to the title. Afterwards she asked them to read the passage with questions in mind and scan through to search for the answers. Similarly, after all the above steps, Dongmei (see Section 5.5) asked students to think and discuss in groups what was important or difficult, then asked volunteers to share these points with the class. In dealing with exam papers, Bailin (see Excerpt 7.5) engaged students in active learning and thinking by asking them to give the answers, think of what they did not understand and report to the class; she then asked other students to explain what was reported as difficult, and she herself only explained and expanded when necessary.

Of the three teachers, Anli and Bailin paid more attention to the development of students' ability to use the language (as discussed in Section 5.7). Whatever they were teaching, they made use of the content in the textbook to facilitate students' practice and use of English in meaningful and authentic ways, rather than mainly to cover the grammar rules and asking students to recite the sentences.

Bailin also paid attention to the overall development of the student (see Excerpt 7.6).

Excerpt 7.6 Bailin Y7 L1

T: [Ready? Ok, I am going to ask someone to act out the conversation.] Conversation 2. ST3, please, ST4.

…

T: Ok, now let's talk about how to point to other people. Just now ST3 pointed like this. (T demonstrating.) Is it appropriate?]

STs: [Should be like this] (showing gesture)

T: [Like this, right?] What's her name? What's his name? (T demonstrates how to point to others politely). Right?

STs: (nodding head)

T: [Ok, pay attention to courtesy. Do not point to others using your finger, especially when you go to Tibet, it is rude to do this. You should do like this, your thumb stands for yourself, you need to put it inwards when point to other] (T demonstrating with hand). [This shows your respect to the others, putting yourself lower, understand?] …

In comparison, the other four teachers tended to focus on covering the content by mainly following the steps in the textbook, telling students about the grammar rules, and doing mainly mechanical drilling and grammar-translation based practice.

In summary, Anli, Bailin, Dongmei focused on the development of students' learning and thinking ability, as well as the ability to use English to communicate (Anli, Bailin). The other teachers mainly focused on covering the content to facilitate the learning about the grammar rules.

7.2.4 Findings and discussion

Learner-centred teachers use a wide variety of resources and input to facilitate learning, adapting content and resources to be meaningful, relevant and developmentally appropriate. Content functions as a means to facilitate the development of students' learning and thinking skills rather than being merely a body of knowledge to be covered. The analysis of the data revealed variation in the degrees to which the teachers' practices were aligned with learner-centred criteria, which is mapped out in Table 7.4.

Table 7.4 Alignment of teachers' practices with learner-centredness – Content and resources

Categories of teacher practices	**Alignment of teacher practices with learner-centredness**			
	Hardly	A little	Some extent	Great extent
Content and resources		C E F G	D	A B

Legend: A – Anli; B – Bailin; C – Chen; D – Dongmei; E – Enya; F – Fang; G – Guiyun

Anli's and Bailin's practices regarding the use of content and resources are to a great extent learner-centred, while Dongmei's practices are to some degree learner-centred. They all adapted the textbook and resources to be meaningful and relevant to their students, focusing on students' ability development, using multimedia resources to engage learners in meaningful learning and discussion. However, Anli and Bailin paid more attention to the development of students' ability to use the language, and the

resources and input they used was richer than Dongmei's. The other four teachers' practices were only to a little degree learner-centred. They used various inputs and resources to facilitate learning. However, they mainly followed the textbooks and used the resources as they were, with a focus on covering the content and the grammar rules and words.

Teachers' use of the textbook and resources was influenced by a wide range of factors, including their goals in teaching, view of the textbooks, availability of supporting resources and technology, and their ability and extent of freedom to use these. How teachers use the textbooks, what resource they use and how they use it influence their effectiveness in facilitating learning. Taking the use of Information Computer Technology (ICT) as an example, the Smart Boards in the classrooms of Yizhi Secondary School were not used. The data projection facilities were used to make learning more interesting and vivid by some teachers, while mainly used to facilitate grammar-translation practices and note taking by others. The use of ICT might have made the teachers' preparation easier, but it might also have made the learning process less meaningful, less interesting, less interactive, while putting much pressure on the students. For example, Dongmei and Fang heavily relied on it, having students take a great amount of notes at a time, assuming that what was copied down would be what students really learnt. In this sense, the use of ICT actually put great pressure on students, which might hinder learning rather than facilitate it. Even less interactive was Fang's practice of showing some questions on a PPT for students to answer, without either her or the students reading out the questions, and then showing the answers on PPT, as well as putting up notes on PPT for students to copy. This practice tends to facilitate a deaf-mute mode of learning a language, and is not using ICT to support effective teaching.

Taking Enya's use of multimedia resources for another example, she spent time searching for a video clip which might be interesting to students and of an appropriate level of difficulty. However, she simply showed the video clip to the class, without

engaging the students in meaningful discussion. Thus using the video clip did not seem to make much difference to students' use of English. Although her intention was good, her use of the video clips functioned as a form only with little relevance to the learning of the language. It could have been made more effective in facilitating learning, discussion and thinking, given that she had already spent much time searching for the video clips. This points to the importance of explicitly involving students in the content.

In summary, this section has provided an insight into teachers' practices regarding content and resources. The alignment of these practices with learner-centredness was mapped out in Table 7.3. The next section will explore teachers' practices regarding the facilitation of learner thinking and learning strategy development.

7.3 Learner thinking and learning strategies

Learner thinking and learning strategies are two vital aspects to address in teaching if teachers are to develop students' as independent and self-regulated learners (as established in Section 2.3). The facilitation of learner thinking and learning strategies by the seven teachers was embedded in their classroom activities and tasks, and classroom interaction and discourse. Five categories of required student thinking were identified among the observed 35 lessons, using the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl 2001) as a reference (see Section 2.2.2.4). These categories were: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating and creating. Each teacher's practices in facilitating learner thinking are outlined in Table 7.4. Generally speaking, teachers focused mainly on lower-order thinking – remembering and understanding. Rather less was the number of the teachers facilitating higher-order thinking and the degree to which they did this.

Regarding learning strategies, all teachers but Enya facilitated students' learning and use of learning strategies. Teachers incorporated the learning and practicing of learning strategies in five different aspects of teaching, namely: new words learning and self-study, reading, listening, exam-taking and note-taking strategies. Teachers'

practices in this regard are also outlined in Table 7.5. Among them, Anli and Bailin more frequently incorporated learning strategies in their teaching than the others. The detailed explanation of teachers' practices regarding the facilitation of learner thinking and learning strategies are provided in the following subsections.

Table 7.5 Learner thinking and learning strategies

Learner thinking and learning strategies	Anli	Bailin	Chen	Dongmei	Enya	Fang	Guiyun
Learner thinking							
• Facilitate remembering & understanding	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
• Facilitate applying	Y	Y	Y-	Y-	Y-	Y-	Y-
• Students thinking for themselves	Y	Y	Y	Y			Y
• Creative thinking	Y						
Learning strategies regarding							
• New words learning/self study	Y	Y-					
• Reading	Y			Y			
• Exam taking		Y	Y-				Y
• Note taking	Y	Y				Y	Y

Legend: Y= the feature was identified in a teacher's class; Y-= the feature was less frequently identified

7.3.1 Learner thinking

All teachers facilitated the remembering and understanding of knowledge, although the degree varied. For example, they all facilitated remembering through pattern drilling, telling students about grammar rules, having students read aloud in chorus and copying many notes. They also facilitated understanding of knowledge through asking students to explain grammar rules and provide reasons for their answers to grammar-translation questions. Their practices varied from the third level of thinking, namely, applying knowledge. Although all teachers facilitated the application of the grammar rules and language knowledge, most of them focused more on the grammar-translation

application of the rules, while Anli and Bailin focused more on the authentic use and practice of the rules and the language items studied (as established in Chapters 5 & 6).

Allowing students to think for themselves was identified in five teachers' classes (Anli, Bailin, Chen, Dongmei, Guiyun), with Anli and Bailin to a greater degree. For example, Anli asked students to think and report anything they did not understand in the transcript and then ask other students to explain (see Excerpt 5.25). Similarly, Bailin asked students to reflect and report what questions they still did not understand in the exam papers and then asked the other students to explain the questions to the class (see Excerpt 7.5). She also asked students to reflect for themselves on what they had learnt in the unit and then report to her a point each (see Excerpt 5.6). Dongmei asked students to find difficult or important points then report to the class (see Excerpt 5.21). As a revision process, Guiyun asked students to reflect and write on the blackboard what they found interesting or difficult (see Excerpt 5.3). Compared with the other five teachers who waited for no more than three seconds for an answer, Anli and Bailin provided a bit longer waiting time after initiating a question, which provided students with more opportunity to think and contemplate the questions.

Facilitating higher-order thinking by asking 'why' questions was identified in all seven teachers' practices, but mainly for grammar-translation explanations about answers to questions in the exercise books or on the exam papers. Only Anli asked students to discuss questions that could only be answered once the students had understood the whole passage, which required them to infer the answers based on their understanding of the whole passage (see Excerpt 5.20). Dongmei asked 'why' to gauge the reason why students liked travelling or why not (see Excerpt 5.17).

Higher-order thinking involving evaluation, such as checking, critiquing and making judgements, was facilitated by four teachers (Anli, Bailin, Chen, Guiyun). For example, in the everyday class sharing activity, Anli involved students in peer feedback and evaluation. She also promoted reflection on the product and process of learning. The

students provided specific and critical comments to the presenter(s) (see Section 5.7.2). Chen used self-correction (see Excerpt 6.19 & 21) and peer checking of answers. Guiyun used peer correction (see Excerpt 6.17 & 19). Bailin consistently involved students in self-checking and peer checking of the exercises. For example, she asked students to check each other's class exercise in pairs and report mistakes to her for her to emphasize (see Excerpt 7.7).

Excerpt 7.7 Bailin Y7 L4

T: Now turn to page 13, page 13. . .
T: [Ok, please check whether you have written number 0 to 9 correctly. Those who haven't finished it, please hurry up. Finish writing numbers 0 to 9, then give to the student next to you to mark. You mark for each other, be quick!
STs: (marking for each other)
T: Finished?
STS: Yes!
T: Ok, you have finished numbers 0 to 9, any mistakes?
1ST: ST1 made mistakes.
T: ST1 made mistakes? ST1, what was wrong?
ST1: Number 2.
T: Did you hear (class)? Two is a tricky number and is often spelt as tow . . .
T: Ok, please continue doing the next exercise . . . please refer to the vocabulary list at the back of the book and do the exercise to preview what we are going to learn today . . . then we will check for each other whether your answers are all correct! . . .
…
T: [Ok, take out your red pen, check the answers (on the Bb) against yours, whose are correct? theirs or yours? be quick! Check your own answers . . . If you can spot their mistakes, you will get a point!]

After the students had nearly finished the written exercise for previewing the lesson, Bailin nominated eight students to write answers on the board and asked others to self-check their own answers against the ones on the board then report the mistakes to her. If they could find other's mistakes on the board, they received a point for their group.

Facilitating creative thinking is a feature only identified in Anli's class, as associated with the 'class report' activity at the beginning of each day's class. As mentioned before, this activity encourages students' creativeness regarding how to do the presentation (see

Section 5.7.2). Each day the presentation was in a different form, with students taking on different roles in the sharing. Some gave a speech about a topic, some introduced their friends, some had a role play as interviewer and interviewees, and some simply acted out a scenario to address a topic related to good manners. The students supported their presentation with PPT slides, pictures and/or stage props.

In summary, students' thinking relating to remembering and understanding was commonly facilitated by all teachers. Their practices varied in regard to students' thinking relating to the application of knowledge and subsequent levels of thinking. The majority of teachers mainly facilitated the application of knowledge with grammar-translation activities, while Anli and Bailin also facilitated students' thinking in applying the knowledge to authentic use and practice. Five teachers − other than Enya and Fang − allowed opportunities for students to think for themselves. Students' critical thinking was facilitated to varying degrees by Anli, Bailin, Chen and Guiyun, while creative thinking was only facilitated by Anli. Besides the development of learner thinking, facilitating students' learning strategies development is of vital importance in facilitating the overall ability to be self-regulated and independent learners, as discussed in the next section.

7.3.2 Learning strategies

Facilitating the use of learning strategies was a practice identified in the classes of six teachers (all but Enya), with Anli and Bailin to a greater extent. The strategies to train and teach were embedded in five different aspects of teaching (see Table 7.4).

The first strategy related to new-word learning and self-studying, which were facilitated in Anli's and Bailin's classes. Anli's 'little teacher' activity (see Section 5.3.2) required students to have self-studied the words at home and then act as little teachers to lead reading the new words or explain the words to the class. Anli reported that she purposefully demonstrated some strategies of learning and remembering new words and had guided them how to self-study the words at home in the previous year. Therefore

the students had gradually become capable of self-studying and explaining the words to the class. The students self-studied the words at home by using learning strategies and skills, such as using audio devices, listening and imitating, practicing reading aloud, referring to resources such as a dictionary, grammar books or the internet. As a result, the students had learnt the words and relevant information well before the class. When they acted as little teachers to explain the words to the class, they were sharing learning strategies and their own thinking to the class, which facilitated the development of cognitive and metacognitive strategies. The students had done so well in self-studying and previewing the words and grammar focus, that she could have more time for practicing and applying the language. Anli's practice not only developed students' learning ability and good learning habits, but also maximized the efficiency of the 45-minute class time. Similarly, Bailin asked the students to self-study the words at home so as to lead the class to read the new words prior to her explanation. She reported that the students were still too young and it would take some time to develop their ability and habit before she could ask them to explain more.

The second set of learning strategies related to reading comprehension, and was facilitated in Anli's and Dongmei's classes (see Section 5.5). They facilitated the learning and use of strategies such as previewing and guessing the main ideas based on the title, reading the questions before the passage so as to read with questions in mind, scanning and searching for key information and answers to the questions. The students discussed answers with peers, reflected and found important and difficult points to take notes on. The third set of learning strategies related to exams, and was a feature identified in Bailin's, Chen's and Guiyun's classes. Bailin emphasized how to handle listening comprehension and how to exclude answers (see Excerpt 7.2). For example, she emphasized the strategy of reading all the answers before listening and excluding answers with new words that had never appeared in the textbook as it was only in reading comprehension that new words would appear. Similarly, Guiyun emphasized the strategy of listening for key words and seizing time to read and analyze the

questions before listening. Regarding how to handle cloze questions, Guiyun also emphasized the steps to take. For example, reading through the whole passage first before starting to choose any answers, and after finishing choosing the answers, reading through the passage again to check them (see Excerpt 7.4). Chen emphasised strategies for approaching the writing tasks in exams. For example, how to read and understand the requirement before starting to write was a focus of Chen's class (see Excerpt 7.8).

Excerpt 7.8 Chen Y7 L3

T: [Let's look at the first key requirement. You tell me (what it is)!]
1ST: [No less than 30 words.]
T: [Good! Someone says no less than 30 words! This is the first key point.]
…
T: [What about the second requirement? What did ST2 say?]
ST2: [All the information in the table needs to be covered.]
T: [Eh! The second, all the information in the table needs to be covered, otherwise what will happen?]
…

The fourth strategy related to taking notes, which was attended to by four teachers (Anli, Bailin, Fang, Guiyun). Bailin and Guiyun emphasized this strategy selectively as necessary. Bailin also emphasized that notes can be taken in shorthand as long as one can understand later (see Excerpt 7.9).

Excerpt 7.9 Bailin Y7 L1

T: [Look, St1 is smart. No need to copy the sentences. You can all make sentences, can't you? Which do you need to copy? The sentence start with 'Its', right? The rest you have copied just now, so why do you still need to copy. You need to learn to organize your notes. You can copy in whatever way you want to, as long as you can understand. You do not need to copy word by word or recite word by word. That is rote learning, right?]

Anli, Fang and Guiyun asked students to underline and number important points in the books and then organize the notes into notebooks after class, making clear how many points are noted.

In summary, all the teachers except for Enya paid attention to the development of learning strategies, with Anli and Bailin to a greater degree. Strategies regarding the

following areas were emphasized by different teachers: new words learning (Anli, Bailin) and self-study (Anli), reading (Anli, Dongmei), exams (Bailin, Guiyun, Chen), and note taking (Anli, Bailin, Fang, Guiyun).

7.3.3 Findings and discussion

Learner-centred teachers provide explicit built-in opportunities to facilitate the development of students' thinking ability and learning strategies. The variation of alignment with learner-centredness of teachers' practices related to learner thinking and learning strategies is mapped out in Table 7.6.

Table 7.6 Alignment of teachers' practices with learner-centredness – Learner thinking and learning strategies

Categories of teacher practices	Alignment with learner-centredness			
	Hardly	A little	Some extent	Great extent
Facilitation of learner thinking		E F	C D G	A B
Facilitation of learning strategies	E	C D F G	B	A
Overall		E F	C D G	A B

Legend: A – Anli; B – Bailin; C – Chen; D – Dongmei; E – Enya; F – Fang; G – Guiyun

Regarding the facilitation of learner thinking, Anli and Bailin were to a great extent learner-centred, followed by Chen, Dongmei and Guiyun. Enya's and Fang's practices were only to a little degree learner-centred. Regarding the facilitation of learning and use of learning strategies, Anli and Bailin were again to a great extent learner-centred, Guiyun's practices were to some degree learner-centred. Chen's, Dongmei's and Fang's practices were to a little degree learner-centred and Enya's practices were hardly learner-centred at all.

Regarding facilitation of learner thinking, Enya and Fang mainly facilitated students' thinking related to remembering, understanding and applying grammar-translation. Chen, Dongmei and Guiyun provided opportunities for students to reflect and think for themselves. Chen and Guiyun also facilitated students' higher-order thinking related to

checking and critiquing by using student self-correction, peer checking (Chen) and peer correction (Guiyun). Anli's and Bailin's practices, being to a great extent learner-centred, not only utilized all the above mentioned practices but also frequently facilitated students' thinking related to applying English in authentic use and practice. Anli also facilitated students' creative thinking with the class sharing activity.

Regarding the facilitation of learning strategies, Enya's practices were hardly learner-centred because she did not incorporate learning strategies training or use in her teaching in the five observed lessons. Chen's, Fang's and Guiyun's practices were more learner-centred because they facilitated students' strategies regarding exam-taking (Chen, Guiyun), notetaking (Fang & Guiyun) and facilitated the use and development of students' reading strategies (Dongmei). Bailin's practices were to some degree learner-centred, as she facilitated students' learning and self-studying of new words at home, exam-taking and note-taking strategies. Anli's practices were to a great extent learner-centred as she systematically demonstrated strategies to approach new words, guided students to use various references and resources to self-study and preview lessons at home, sharing their thinking and learning strategies in class. She also facilitated the use and development of students' reading strategies. Moreover, she purposefully and systematically facilitated students' note-taking strategies, which catered for the slower students, promoted peer learning and interaction after class and trained students how to organize their study.

The ultimate goal of learner-centred education can be interpreted as developing self-directed or autonomous life-long learners (see Section 2.2.2.4). To achieve this goal, of vital importance is the development of learners' higher-order thinking and learning strategies that can be transferred to future learning. However, as Nunan (2001) points out, for the majority of learners, if not all, such abilities are not naturally endowed but are gradually developed and learnt. Therefore, teachers should incorporate training and use of these skills in language teaching processes. Teachers' practices in this regard, however, varied greatly. Some teachers mainly facilitated lower-order thinking, while

others facilitated a wider range of thinking levels. The more higher-order thinking is promoted, the more knowledge transfer would probably be facilitated (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). Most teachers mainly facilitated applying grammar-translation knowledge, which mainly facilitated linguistic competence yet constrained students' development of communicative competence. Higher-order thinking relating to evaluation and critiquing was facilitated by four teachers, but mainly in the form of peer-checking and correction. Some strategies such as those used by Anli (i.e. peer feedback, evaluation, grading and creative thinking) and Chen (i.e. self-correction) should be advocated to facilitate more transfer of learning. Making judgements and giving feedback on others' presentations facilitates higher-order thinking and reflection.

Similarly, regarding learning strategies, some teachers rarely incorporated learning strategy training and use in their teaching, thus not developing transferable skills and abilities. By contrast, other teachers purposefully and systematically incorporated learning strategy training and use in their teaching, empowering learners to be capable future learners. For example, the 'little teacher' activity, which enhanced self-study ability and promoted sharing of thinking and strategies, is about expanding learning beyond classroom (Wong & Nunan, 2011). It develops students' ability and awareness of using a variety of resources and references to support their learning, rather than mainly relying on teachers and classroom learning. These strategies (such as note-taking and organizing, seeking reference from peers, taking the initiative to note down what is important, and reading strategies) are transferable to all other learning areas. These practices empower learners to be effective learners and self-directed learners (Cohen, 1998; Nunan, 1999; Wenden, 2002). As great variations exist among teachers, students are prepared differently for future learning. This difference raises a concern about teachers' effectiveness in facilitating transferable learning within the same 45-minute duration lesson, as well as what factors have influenced their practices.

As every teaching practice needs to have a pedagogical purpose, teachers need to be responsive to learners and learning. Using note-taking as an example, copying down the

notes does not mean that learning will take place. Teachers need to consider the quantity of note-taking they require from students and whether they are using note-taking as an end itself or to facilitate real learning and understanding, bearing in mind that what is taught is not necessarily learnt.

In summary, this section has analyzed teachers' practices regarding the facilitation of learner thinking and learning strategies. Teachers' practices were mapping against the framework of learner-centredness. The next section will complete the big picture of teachers' classroom practices by analyzing teachers' practices related to the creation of a classroom learning environment and climate.

7.4 Classroom learning environment and climate

The physical environment of the observed classes (see Section 5.1) was to some degree constrained by contextual factors. The seating arrangement was not flexible, due to large class sizes and because students mainly remained in the same classroom throughout different classes and were expected to be seated in a relatively stable place in the big group rather than change from class to class. Teachers did not have much control over the physical environment except to decorate the classroom, for example, with students' work, pictures, maps and books.

The classroom climate, however, was to a great degree influenced by teachers' practices throughout the teaching and learning process. Five features were identified in the observed classes which influenced the classroom learning climate, namely: 1) good class organization, routines and management; 2) use of inclusive language; 3) positive attitudes and respect; 4) minimal criticism and threat with constant encouragement; and 5) sharing decision making with learners. An overview of how each feature is reflected in each teacher's practice is provided in Table 7.7.

Table 7.7 Learning environment and classroom climate

Practices regarding classroom learning environment & climate	Anli	Bailin	Chen	Dongmei	Enya	Fang	Guiyun
Good class organization and routines	Y	Y	Y-	Y		Y-	Y-
Using inclusive language	Y	Y	Y		Y-		Y+
Demonstrating positive, respectful and trustful attitudes	Y+	Y+					Y
Minimal criticism and threat with constant encouragement	Y	Y	Y-	Y-			Y-
Sharing decision making with learners/allow choices	Y	Y			Y		Y

Legend: Y= the feature was identified in a teacher's class; Y+= the feature was frequently identified; Y-= the feature was less frequently identified

7.4.1 Classroom organization and routines

Classes were well-organized with well-established routines in Anli's, Bailin's and Dongmei's classes, where the students were observed to understand clearly what to do at different stages and in different activities. In comparison, the other teachers' classes were not so well-organised regarding group work (Enya, Fang, Guiyun,) and class rules: also norms and expectations were not so well-established, for example, regarding class interaction and activities (Chen, Enya), and/or discipline regarding following teacher instruction (Enya).

First, group work was not well-organized in the classes of Enya, Fang and Guiyun. The students seemed to not know clearly what to do for group work (see Excerpt 5.35 for Fang's class). Possibly Fang's students were not accustomed to doing group work and Fang did not state clearly how to carry out the activity, thus students seemed not to know how to do it and therefore did not do well in the reporting process. Fang seemed to have realized that she did not explain clearly, so she explained it again at the end of the activity.

Second, the class rules and norms were not well-established in Chen's and Enya's

classes. For example, in Chen's class, the students did not know whether they should shout the answer out or wait for nomination (see Excerpt 7.10).

Excerpt 7.10 Chen Y7 L1

T: Ok, let's review! […write out the words or sentences according to the requirement] (PPT showing questions). I will ask some students.
T: OK, No.1, [the first one]. Can you see, ST1?
ST1: Grandfather
T: Grandfather, [what's its colloquial form?]
ST1: (cannot answer)
STS: (giving clues)
T: OK, ST2, would you please.
ST2: Grandpa
1ST: Grandfa?
T: OK, grandpa, Ok, grandpa, sit down please. Ok No.2.
1ST: Let me try!
T: Father
STS: Dad
T: father ST3
ST3: dad
…
T: Ok, mother
STs: mom
…
T: very easy, ST7
ST7: mom
T: Mom. Ok, next, [the plural form of] friend.
STs: friends
T: OK, be quiet, Ok, ST8, [the plural form of] friend, [what to add to it?]
ST8: Add 's'

The students seemed enthusiastic, constantly shouting the answers out. Chen did not say whether they should shout out the answer or wait for her to nominate them. Therefore, the class was a bit out of order.

Similarly, in Enya's class, when someone was talking or giving a presentation, the students were not listening carefully. They were not required to give any comments or listen to understand, so it seemed none of their business when they were not the one to speak. Therefore, the speaker seemed not respected. This formed a striking contrast to

Anli's class where everyone paid due attention to the speaker and gave feedback to the speaker as appropriate.

Moreover, Enya did not set up class rules about following the teacher's instruction. For example, Enya asked students to draw a family picture to introduce their family to the class. About 16 minutes later, she asked students to come to the front to introduce the people they had drawn on the picture. However, Student 3 simply said that he did not draw and Enya had no comments nor measures about it regarding discipline, but asked him to start drawing one (see Excerpt 7.11).

Excerpt 7.11 Enya Y7 L4

[Ok, I will ask you to introduce your family you have just drawn], ST1 come here.
T: [Your picture is too small]
STS: (laughter)
T: [First greet the class!] Hello everyone!
ST1: Hello everyone!
…
T: ST3
ST3: [I didn't draw!]
T: [You didn't draw? Open your mouth (to speak!)]. You draw it now, and say it when you have finished drawing. Next one, next one (meaning ST4)
ST4: Oh! My name is ST4. This is my mother. Her name is Mary …

Enya could have set up some rules with the students regarding the consequences of not doing work as required. Instead, she just let it go when ST3 said 'I didn't draw'. In this way, other students might follow the example of this student in the future and the class would become harder to manage.

In summary, the class routines, norms and expectations were well-established in Anli's, Bailin's and Dongmei's classes, but in comparison still needed to be established by other teachers in areas regarding group work (Enya, Guiyun, Fang), class interaction and activities (Chen, Enya) and discipline regarding following teacher instructions (Enya).

7.4.2 Using inclusive language

Using inclusive language, such as ‘we’, ‘us’, ‘let’s’, when addressing students was a feature in five teachers’ classes (Anli, Bailin, Chen, Enya, Guiyun). Guiyun used this language more frequently. See Excerpt 7.12 for example:

Excerpt 7.12 Guiyun Y9 L1

T: [While they are writing on the blackboard, what shall we do? We should not have our hands free, right? We can do the same thing on our own. Let’s take out our notebooks, choosing and writing down some good sentences and useful phrases. After finishing our own, have a look at the blackboard to see what sentences other students appreciate, whether I should put them in my notebook … Ok, let’s spend some time looking at the sentences on the blackboard and finding out where they come from.]

The use of such inclusive language facilitated a sense of belonging and close bond between the teacher and students. Guiyun commented in the post-observation interview that the use of such words bonded her and the students as a group and the students would be more willing to accept her. She added that using ‘you’ sounds like marking the boundaries or keeping some distance between her and the students.

While Enya generally used ‘we’ when addressing students, she used ‘you’ when she compared the students with another class, commenting on how students had done the activity of introducing their family to the class based on a family picture they had drawn (see Excerpt 7.13)

Excerpt 7.13 Enya Y7 L5

T: You really did not do as well as Class Five. Students in Class Five are more outgoing than you, while you only know to laugh! You are the one who laughed (facing a student).

Similarly, Dongmei not only tended to use ‘class’, ‘your class’, but compared the class with another class when explaining the exam paper (see Excerpt 7.14).

Excerpt 7.14 Dongmei Y9 L4

T: [This question, the other class did much better than your class. I will explain (this question) to your class next time. The answers are DCADB.]

Fang also uses ‘you’ frequently, which seemed to be putting distance between her and the students (see Excerpt 7.15):

Excerpt 7.15 Fang Y8 L4

T: [Now, I help you to review, after which there will be a test. You should not be taking no notes during revision or you will know nothing later on.]

By using ‘you’, ‘your class’ frequently and/or comparing a class with another class in unfavourable terms, Enya, Dongmei and Fang set a distance between themselves and their students or extended a negative attitude towards the students. In reflecting, Dongmei said that she did not realize her way of expression may hurt the students or set up a boundary and she really wanted to let them feel that she treated the two classes the same way in her mind. She admitted that she was not careful with the words she used, saying that she would pay more attention in future.

In summary, Anli, Bailin, Chen, and Guiyun used inclusive language to reinforce the bond with students. In comparison, Fang tended to use ‘you’ and Dongmei tended to use ‘your class’. Enya and Dongmei also compared the class with another class in unfavourable ways. Their practices might have set some distance between themselves and the students and/or extended negative attitudes to the students.

7.4.3 Demonstrating positive, respectful and trusting attitudes

Demonstrating positive, respectful and trusting attitudes towards students was a feature identified in Anli’s, Bailin’s and Guiyun’s classes. Anli was always showing and extending positive attitudes towards the students and even their parents. When she asked the students whether they had listened to the tape and read aloud at home and whether their parents have signed for their homework, all the students said yes. Then she commented ‘your parents did as well as you!’ She consistently gave positive feedback and encouragement to value students’ effort and participation.

Anli also demonstrated her trust to all the students in that she shared classroom management responsibility with them. She had students take turns weekly to be group

leaders to supervise others, or to recite or read the words or text. Therefore, all the students would have the opportunity to take this role and share the responsibilities. Her practice demonstrated her trust to all the students and her wish to provide equal opportunity to the students. In comparison, although all the other teachers shared class management responsibility with the students by having leaders to collect/hand out homework and supervise other members to recite text or words, the group leaders were only limited to a few students.

Bailin was caring, polite and respectful to the students. For example, she said 'sorry' when she did not hear a student clearly (see Excerpt 7.16).

Excerpt 7.16 Bailin Y9 L1

T: [The last question, I just said that Polly is a parrot]
STS: Its
ST9: Its name is
T: His name is？
ST9: Its
T: Its name is Polly. [Good! Sorry I did not hear clearly!]

Bailin always had a considerate tone. For example, see Excerpt 7.17.

Excerpt 7.17 Bailin Y9 L3

T: [Ok! We will dictate the words in random order rather than according to the sequence in the book, as what we have said last time. Every word will be read twice, shall we?
STS: [Ok!]
. . .
T: [Is the homework too much?]
STS: [No!]
T: [Then you should have no problem, right?

Bailin also demonstrated her trust of students by involving them in self-marking and peer-marking. Similarly, Guiyun was patient and respectful throughout the classes. She demonstrated her appreciation of students' work and contribution, for example, by saying 'Let's appreciate what learning fruit we have achieved' (Guiyun, L1).

In summary, Anli, Bailin and Guiyun demonstrated positive, respectful and trusting attitudes to students, valuing students' participation and effort, and sharing more responsibility with the students.

7.4.4 Minimal criticism and threat, with constant encouragement

Minimal criticism and threat, with constant encouragement was a feature in Anli's and Bailin's classes. The atmosphere in their classes seemed to be more relaxed and stress-free compared to other classes. They gave students constant care and encouragement, facilitating students' sense of self-efficacy and willingness to participate in class activities. For example, when not many students raised hands to read aloud a dialogue in pairs, Anli encouraged the students (Excerpt 7.18).

Excerpt 7.18 Anli Y8 L5

T: [Now read the dialogue in pairs]. Any volunteers? (T raising her hand to indicate students to raise their hands, but not many students raising hands).

T: [Ah, so few of you raise your hands! Actually every one of you can do very well if you stand up, why are you not confident? Look, now someone is raising hands! ST1 and your partner.]

ST1& ST2: (Reading the dialogue)

Her words assured the students that they were capable of doing the task well, and they became more active participants afterwards. Anli also consistently modelled giving applause to praise or acknowledge students' effort and participation. It had become a routine that whenever a student made an effort to participate or had done well, she and the whole class would automatically applaud the student.

Bailin seized the opportunity to praise or encourage students whenever they improved a little (see Excerpt 7.19).

Excerpt 7.19 Bailin Y9 L1

T: ST1, [Do you remember what we talked about? ST1, do you remember what we have just talked about?] (walking towards ST1)

ST1: [Yes, I do.]

T: [You are doing well this class. You did not listen in today's morning reading section, that was not right, was it?]

T: [Now, get ready quickly!] …

By contrast, in the other teachers' classes, the students might not have felt safe to answer questions or participate due to various reasons. First, the frequent use of the N-I-R-F pattern (nominating students before asking questions) by Enya might have caused a sense of insecurity and unpreparedness (see Excerpt 6.8). Second, the constant lack of feedback or comments by Enya on students' performance or answers might have left students with a sense of uncertainty and disengagement (see Excerpt 6.14). Third, the practice of deducting points, as in Chen's approach, might have had a negative impact on the students and discouraged them, leading to even less participation.

A fourth factor affecting students' participation could be the frequent use of sentences like 'I think it's quite easy' and 'Very easy' after initiating a question as identified in Dongmei's classes (for an example, see Excerpt 5.12). Such wording might have caused an insecure atmosphere, constraining students' willingness to answer questions. Another action that might have caused a feeling of embarrassment and partly contributed to student's unwillingness to volunteer to answer questions or comment on peers' work was keeping a student standing for a long time. This was Guiyun's practice after a student stood up to answer questions (see Excerpt 6.16). For another example, when Guiyun asked students to stand up and say something about the propositions that they had reviewed the day before, nobody volunteered. Even when she compromised by asking students to write on the board rather than speak, the students were still not willing to participate (see Excerpt 7.20).

Excerpt 7.20 Guiyun Y9 L5

T: [Tell us some key points. Ok, if you do not want to speak, then go and write on the Bb. Go and write on your own.]
STs: (nobody is going)
T: You need me to call your name? Every time you need me to nominate! Go and write … ST1 go and write out the propositions of locality. ST2, go and write a dialogue of asking and giving directions! the others write on your own exercise book …]

The students seemed to be passive, not willing to volunteer to speak or engage. They seemed not to dare to show or try, preferring not to stand out. Consequently, this

sentence ‘every time you need me to nominate’ appeared in every one of Guiyun’s classes.

Another discouragement was the use of a criticizing tone as identified in Fang’s class (see Excerpt 7.21).

Excerpt 7.21 Fang Y8 L4

T: [You need to respond quickly, now that we have finished studying the whole unit, right! Now you look, look quickly, then I am going to ask students to stand up. You do not need to copy, only think about what should be used to fill each blank. ST1, No.1.]

ST1: brought

T: [For this blank we use] bought, good, [correct!] ST1, sit down.

…

T: No.3, ST3. [Tell us first which part you will underline?]

ST3: half an hour ago

T: Half an hour ago, [should we underline this part?]

ST3: [Yes.]

T: [Since it was something that happened half an hour ago, it should be in the past tense, so what to use to fill the blank?]

ST3: [(I) do not know how to read!] (mumbling to T, feeling embarrassed)

T: [Do not know how to read!] (in an emphasizing and criticising tone) ‘was [and what else?] ‘were’. No.4, ST4.

…

T: No.8 [is a negative sentence.] ST8!

ST8: (standing up, but does not know the answer.)

T: [what to use to fill the blank?]

ST8: (still does not know, a student next to ST8 turns around trying to tell the answers to ST8)

T: Can you? [You cannot?]

ST8: She …

T: [Louder!]

ST8: She didn’t watched

T: She didn’t, watched [is still needed? Is it needed? I ask you!]

ST8: [needed]

T: She didn’t watch TV

STs & T: yesterday evening

T: Yesterday evening [is underlined, and it is a negative sentence, so you need an auxiliary verb to help it here. That’s it!]

During this revision process, Fang said ‘You need to respond quickly, now that we have finished studying the whole unit, right?’ Her words hinted that the students were capable of answering the questions easily and quickly with the knowledge gained from the unit. This expectation might have created a sense of insecurity and nervousness. It seemed hard for Student 3 to pronounce the word ‘was’, mumbling ‘do not know how to read’, in an embarrassed way. Fang repeated his words in an emphatic and criticizing tone. Afterwards, Student 8 was unable to answer the question, and Fang seemed impatient, pushing Student 8 to give the answer. The whole episode was filled with tension and a sense of threat, constraining students’ willingness to try to answer questions because making mistakes was unacceptable. This might partly explain why the students were observed to be inactive in answering her questions.

In summary, Anli and Bailin created a relaxed, secure and stress-free classroom climate with minimal criticism and threat by giving students constant support and encouragement. In comparison, other teachers to some degree caused a sense of insecurity and unwillingness to respond or participate. The practice included teachers’ discourse patterns (Dongmei, Enya), feedback features (Enya), the approach to discipline (Chen), unintentional words or actions (Dongmei, Guiyun) and teachers’ tone and attitude (Fang).

7.4.5 Sharing decision making with learners

Sharing decision making with students was a feature identified in four teachers’ classes (Anli, Bailin, Guiyun, Enya). For example, Anli allowed full freedom of choice regarding the class sharing activity. It was totally up to the students to decide when, what, how to present and with whom. Bailin discussed with students whether to spend more time practicing the conversations in class or at home (see Excerpt 7.22).

Excerpt 7.22 Bailin Y7 L1

T: Ok, let’s go on to the next part. Look at 2C, pair work [pair work], practice the conversations in pairs. [Ok, please practice the conversations. Before we do it, I want to ask you whether you still want time to practice the previous conversation (in 2B) or you

prefer to practice at home.]

STs: [At home!]

T: [At home, right? Then you do it at home, Ok?] Ok, let's go on.2C

Similarly, Guiyun also let students choose which part of the exam paper to talk about in class.

Excerpt 7.23 Guiyun Y9, L5

T: All right, today we are going to finish two sections. [The second section is cloze questions or blank-filling questions; you can choose which to finish first. Cloze or Blank-filling questions?]

STS: [Cloze.]

T: [Cloze is what we are most scared of, isn't it? (It's) something we are least good at. Ok, you have corrected the mistakes last night, Ok …]

Enya also allowed students choices as to what they wanted to do with the dialogue, to recite or to act them out (see Excerpt 7.24).

Excerpt 7.24 Enya Y7 L5

T: [Do you remember that we said three students as a group, working in threes; and if you can recite it (dialogue) with your books closed, then you can get the signature later? If you do not want to recite, what would you like to do?]

STs: Act it out.

Small though these incidents might seem, by giving students some freedom of choice, teachers set up a more democratic atmosphere in the class.

In summary, four teachers shared decision making with students, allowing students some choice. This practice facilitated students' ability to make informed decisions.

7.4.6 Findings and discussion

Learner-centred teachers create a physically and mentally healthy, safe and inclusive environment where individual learners are respected, valued and empowered. The analysis of teachers' practices in this regard revealed the variation of degrees to which teachers' practices were aligned with learner-centredness (see Table 7.8). Some teachers' practices created or facilitated a positive, safe and encouraging environment that was conducive to learning and interaction, while others' practices might have caused a sense

of insecurity and unwillingness to participate, interact and speak.

Table 7.8 Alignment of teachers' practices with learner-centredness – Overview

Categories of teacher practices	Alignment with learner-centredness			
	Hardly	A little	Some extent	Great extent
Learning environment and classroom climate	E F	C D	G	A B

Legend: A – Anli; B – Bailin; C – Chen; D – Dongmei; E – Enya; F – Fang; G – Guiyun

Enya's and Fang's practices hardly aligned with learner-centredness. Although Enya allowed students choices on one occasion, her class routines were not well-established regarding what was expected when someone was giving a presentation. She did not have clear discipline plans, for example, regarding students not following instructions. Although she generally used 'we' to address students, she compared the class with another class in unfavourable terms. Furthermore, her frequent use of the N-I-R-F pattern might have caused a sense of unpreparedness and pressure, while her constant lack of feedback to students might have caused a sense of disengagement and uncertainty. In comparison, Fang's classes were generally well-organized and routines well-established, except for the organization of group work activities. However, she tended to use 'you' to address the students. More importantly, her critical tone when correcting students' mistakes and when students could not answer questions seemed to have caused a sense of threat, resulting in a classroom climate that was not conducive to participation and learning.

Chen and Dongmei's practices were to a little degree learner-centred. Although both teachers' classes were well organized and routines well-established, Dongmei tended to address the students as 'class', 'your class' and compared the class with another class in unfavourable terms. Her unconscious frequent use of 'very easy' might have caused a sense of insecurity, prohibiting students from trying to avoid making mistakes. In comparison, Chen used inclusive language when addressing the students. However, she failed to seize opportunities to encourage but rather frequently deducted points for

disciplinary purposes. Such a practice might cause a negative classroom climate.

In comparison, Anli's and Bailin's practices were to a great extent learner-centred. Besides the good class organization, well-established routines and the use of inclusive language, they demonstrated their respect, trust, care and positive attitudes towards the students. More importantly, they shared decision making with students, allowing students choices and giving constant feedback and encouragement. In this way, they created a relaxed and enjoyable classroom environment that was conducive to participation and learning. Guiyun's practices were to some degree learner-centred. She shared good practices with Anli and Bailin. The only concern about her class was her unconscious practices of keeping students standing for a long time, which might have caused students' unwillingness to stand up to participate in activities and answer questions.

The findings suggest that an important factor influencing the classroom climate is whether class routines, norms and expectations are well-established and communicated, and whether class activities are well-organized. Such organization determines whether students quickly come on task, follow teachers' instructions and fulfil teachers' requirements and expectations. A thoughtful class management and discipline plan should be established early at the beginning of a new semester, through 'democratic decision making processes' with students so that students will learn to 'accept responsibility for [their] own actions' (Johnson & Sullivan 2015, p. 2; Johnson, Whitington & Oswald, 1994). The findings show that three teachers were willing to share power and control with students, as they shared decision-making or allowed students freedom of choice to varying degrees. Their practice demonstrated their trust in students' ability and worth. Such practice is likely to enhance students' self-efficacy and empower students to make decisions and take responsibility for their learning.

The findings show that whether the classroom learning environment and climate is conducive to participation and learning is influenced by various aspects of teacher

practice. At a macro level, these include the nature of activities and tasks used, the interaction and discourse features deployed, and the assessment approaches teachers adopt. At a micro level, factors include minute-to-minute interactions, questioning and feedback, the tones in which teachers speak, and even an unconscious wording of the teacher. The type of classroom learning environment influences the students' sense of belonging, security and the perceived value of making mistakes and participation, which in turn, sensitizes students into particular ways of learning and interaction, influencing their confidence and willingness to try and participate in the classroom activities and interactions, and thus, their active engagement in the learning process. This is a key to reducing classroom discipline problems and ensuring successful learning (Pianta et al., 2012).

The ways teachers interact with the students, their attitudes towards the students and whether or not they value students' participation and effort make a difference to the general class climate. Practices such as using inclusive language can facilitate a sense of belonging and build group bonding (Hall & Verplaetes, 2000). However, comparing a class or a student publicly with other classes or students in unfavourable terms is likely to distance the teacher and the students. No matter what intention the teacher has, such comparison is likely to lower students' self-esteem and confidence.

The findings reveal that some unconscious words or actions may influence the classroom environment in a negative way, constraining students from participation and trying. For example, the unconscious yet frequent words of 'I think it is easy' might prohibit students from making mistakes as it assumes that nobody should be making mistakes. This highlights a mismatch of teachers' and students' perceptions and understanding. What the teacher finds easy may not be really easy to students. Similarly, what teachers think they have already taught may not be what students have learnt and understood. This mismatch may result in teachers' feeling frustrated and using inappropriate words or tone as Fang did, who expected that the students should give the answers quickly at the end of a unit. Therefore, teaching needs to be responsive to

learners and learning, an essential aspect of learner-centred education that should be reinforced to reach more teachers and influence their beliefs and practices.

7.5 Chapter summary

This chapter has added to the understanding of how students are assessed, how the content and resources are used, how learner thinking and learning strategies are promoted or constrained, and the way the classroom learning environment and climate are created, identifying the effectiveness of teachers' practices in facilitating a learner-centred environment conducive to learning. The learner-centredness of teachers' practices related to these aspects has been mapped out in Tables 7.2, 7.4, 7.6, and 7.8. So far, a complete picture of the seven EFL teachers' classroom teaching practices has been provided with detailed and comprehensive explanations of the teaching processes. The next chapter will connect teachers' beliefs with practices to explore how teachers' practices align with their beliefs as well as key factors that influence the alignment or misalignment.

Chapter 8 Alignment of practices with beliefs: influential factors

The previous four data chapters have analysed teachers' beliefs (Chapter 4) and classroom practices (Chapter 5-7). Chapter 4 has provided some insights regarding what factors might have caused the discrepancies between teachers' beliefs and practices, including: teachers' perceptions of contextual factors, such as the large class size, the nature of exams, the pressure and expectation from stakeholders, and the poor prior learning of students. To further the understanding of the relationship between influential factors and teachers' beliefs and practices, this chapter aims to answer the following questions: *How do the teachers' practices align with their beliefs? What factors influence the alignment or misalignment?*

This chapter starts with a 'bird's eye' view of the alignment of teachers' practices with beliefs (Section 8.1). It then explores factors that influence teachers' practices and change (Section 8.2), followed by a discussion of the dynamic and interactive relationships of these factors (Section 8.3). This chapter draws on the post-observation interview data as well as overall contextual information related to the curriculum and individual teachers' unique background.

8.1 Alignment of teachers' practices with beliefs

The degree to which each of the seven teachers' various beliefs and practices aligned with learner-centredness has been analyzed and presented in seven tables in Chapters 4–7. These tables are now synthesized into Table 8.1. In sum, teachers' beliefs were generally more aligned with learner-centredness than were their practices.

Table 8.1 Alignment of teacher beliefs/practices with learner-centredness – Overview

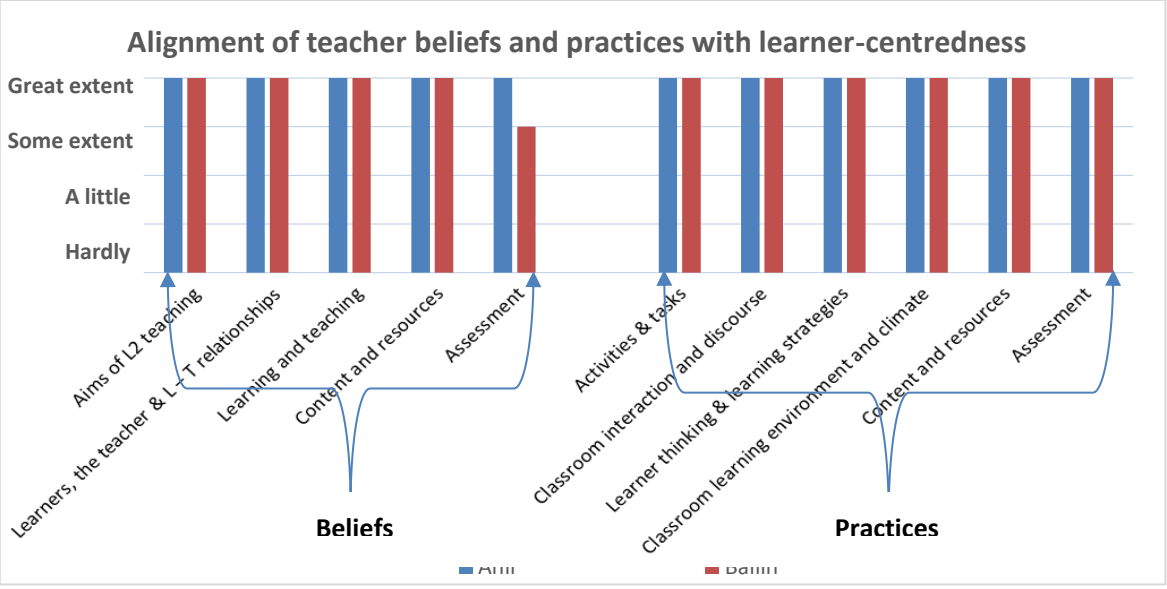
Categories of beliefs/ practices		Alignment with learner-centredness			
		Hardly	A little	Some extent	Great extent
Beliefs	Aims of L2 teaching	D F	E	C G	A B
	Learners, the teacher and the L–T relationships		F	C D E	A B G
	Learning and teaching		C E F	D	A B G
	Content and resources		E F	D G	A B C
	Assessment		E F	B C D G	A
Practices	Activities and tasks		C E F G	D	A B
	Classroom Interaction and discourse		E F G	C D	A B
	Learner thinking and Learning strategies		E F	C D G	A B
	Learning environment and classroom climate	E F	C D	G	A B
	Content and resources		C E F G	D	A B
	Assessment	F	C D E G		A B

Legend: A – Anli; B – Bailin; C – Chen; D – Dongmei; E – Enya; F – Fang; G – Guiyun

Of these seven teachers, Anli's and Bailin's beliefs and practices were highly aligned to learner-centredness. By comparison, Chen, Dongmei and Guiyun were aligned moderately, while Enya and Fang showed low alignment. The following subsections discuss how the practices of the teachers within each group align with their beliefs. Due to the similarities of beliefs and practices of Anli and Bailin, the discussion about them is integrated. The other teachers will be discussed separately, due to distinct differences between them.

8.1.1 Anli and Bailin

The high-alignment teachers were Anli and Bailin. Their beliefs and practices were both to a great extent aligned with learner-centredness (see Table 8.1).



Legend: the X axis represents categories of teacher beliefs and practices; the Y axis represents the extent of alignment to learner-centredness.

Figure 8.1 Alignment of beliefs and practices with learner-centredness – Anli and Bailin

Overall, Anli's and Bailin's beliefs were to a great extent aligned with learner-centred beliefs. They both:

- embraced the aims of facilitating learners' ability to speak and use English, and to facilitate their thinking, learning and overall abilities, rather than only to pass exams
- believed that learning is facilitated in a positive and safe learning environment, where learners' individual differences are catered for, learners are respected, valued and accepted for who they are
- believed that deep learning takes place when learning is made relevant, interesting and meaningful to learners and when learners are engaged in active learning, thinking, discussion and participation
- thought that content and resources should be adapted flexibly as appropriate to students' developmental level and learning needs, and that teaching to students' real understanding and developing students' ability to learn and think is more important than covering the content
- maintained that assessment should be used for learning rather than on learning only, and teachers should monitor students' progress constantly to provide feedback on individual growth and to teach accordingly.

Anli also expressed a view supporting criterion-referenced evaluation of the learners,

while Bailin pointed out the importance and necessity of norm-referenced assessment of learners. Anli's data also revealed a view of incorporating learner choice and voices in assessment.

Anli's and Bailin's practices highly reflected their beliefs, as indicated in their below-listed practices:

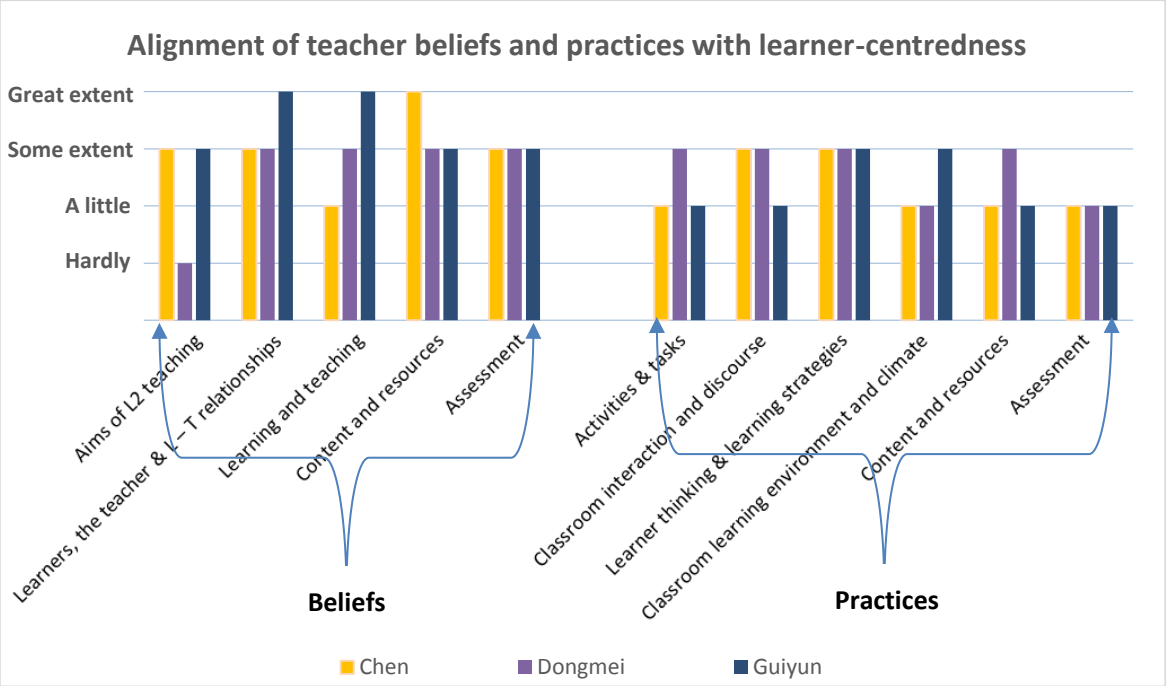
- *classroom activities and tasks* – used a wide range of class activities and tasks to engage students in active processing of knowledge and information, building on students' prior learning and experience, making learning relevant and interesting to students.
- *classroom interaction and discourse* – varied interaction patterns and used pair/group work patterns frequently, with Bailin providing students with equal opportunities to participate and answer questions. They asked questions frequently with varying discourse patterns to engage learners in active thinking and learning, using student-initiated questioning, letting students 'do' the explanation, sharing, practicing, thinking, giving feedback (Anli), peer marking and nominating others (Bailin).
- *content and resources* – adapted content and resources flexibly to be meaningful and relevant to their students and to serve the purpose of developing students' ability and thinking, using multimedia and rich resources to engage the learners in meaningful learning and discussion.
- *learning strategies and learning thinking* – Anli systematically demonstrated strategies to approach new words, guided students to self-study and preview lessons at home, sharing their thinking and learning strategies in class. She also facilitated the use and development of students' reading strategies. Moreover, she purposefully and systematically facilitated students' note-taking strategies, promoted peer learning and interaction after class and trained students how to organize their study. Bailin facilitated students' learning and self-studying of new words at home, exam-taking strategies and note-taking strategies.
- *assessment* – used formative evaluation and assessment mechanisms for behaviour and class management such as, involving students in peer assessment (Anli) and constantly monitoring students' progress and giving timely and specific feedback and encouragement to individual students (Bailin). Bailin's beliefs about evaluating students as compared to others first seemed contradictory to her other beliefs. Nevertheless, this belief did not imply that she herself would judge a student based on the norm-referenced evaluation result. She provided students with information

regarding how they compared with others and with another class and the way she expressed it did not seem to cause negative effects.

- *classroom learning environment and climate* – created a relaxed and enjoyable classroom environment that was conducive to students' learning, interaction and participation. Their classes were well-organized and routines well-established. They used inclusive language, demonstrated respect, trust, care and positive attitudes towards the students. They also shared decision making with students and allowed students choices.

8.1.2 Chen, Dongmei and Guiyun

The medium-alignment teachers were Chen, Dongmei and Guiyun, whose beliefs and practices ranged from 'to a little' to 'to some extent' aligned with learner-centredness (see Figure 8.2).



Legend: the X axis represents categories of teacher beliefs and practices; the Y axis represents the extent of alignment to learner-centredness.

Figure 8.2 Alignment of beliefs and practices with learner-centredness – Chen, Dongmei, Guiyun

Their beliefs are generally to some degree aligned with learner-centred beliefs, with the following exceptions: Chen's beliefs about learning and teaching are only to a little

degree learner-centred, Dongmei's embracing of the 'exam' as the only aim for teaching is hardly learner-centred, and Guiyun's beliefs regarding learners, the teacher and the L–T relationships, and learning and teaching were to a great extent learner-centred. As against their beliefs, their practices were generally to a lesser extent aligned with learner-centredness. The details are now explained.

8.1.2.1 Chen

Chen openly denied 'exam' as an aim and only embraced the other two aims, namely, to develop students' ability to speak and use English and to develop their learning and thinking ability. Her practices reflected her beliefs to some degree, as she did occasionally engage students in meaningful practice and authentic use of English, occasionally using student self-correction and peer correction to facilitate interaction, reflection and thinking. She regarded content and pace as flexible and adjustable in order to teach for students' real understanding and ability development. However, most of the time, she focused on covering the answers to the exercises and homework, with her teaching grammar-translation based, which seemed contradictory to her espoused aims of teaching.

Chen's beliefs regarding catering for individual differences and constant monitoring of students' progress to provide feedback were also not reflected in her practice. She did not attend to individual students' needs and failed to seize opportunities to allow the so-called problem students to demonstrate their progress and thereby encourage them as appropriate. Although she generally demonstrated positive attitudes and respect, valuing students' participation and effort, her approach of deducting points for disciplinary purposes seemed discouraging. Sometimes she asked questions and immediately provided the answers, which constrained students' opportunities to contemplate or discuss with peers. She also failed to attend to what the students were really doing and thinking, assuming that the students were doing as she required and learning what she was teaching.

Furthermore, her belief that learning is more effective when it is of personal relevance and interesting to learners was not well-reflected. She had a tendency to use the T-WC interaction pattern and did not often engage students in discussion or peer interaction. She used a great deal of predictable turn allocation patterns, having students stand up one-by-one in turn to report an answer each. Thus the students seemed not interested nor engaged.

8.1.2.2 Dongmei

Although the aim of teaching that Dongmei embraced (for exams only) was hardly aligned with learner-centredness, Dongmei's other beliefs are generally to some degree aligned. Accordingly, her practice reflected more than merely preparing students for exams. She facilitated students' communicative competence by asking authentic questions and facilitated meaningful discussion on topics relevant to the students. She also used the daily class sharing activity for students to give oral presentations, although with little feedback and discussion about the presentations. She facilitated students' learning and discussion with activities such as reflecting, recalling and reporting what they had learnt before, engaging in pair and group discussions about the correct answers, and sharing with the class what they thought was important. She empowered the students by incorporating learning strategies training in the reading activity.

Her practices were generally consistent with her other beliefs except for her practices regarding assessment, and classroom learning environment and climate. Dongmei maintained that assessment should be both of learning and for learning and that students' progress needed to be monitored systematically. In practice, she used formative assessment to monitor students' performance and progress. However, the exam papers/results were not used for learning. Dongmei dominated the class talking time, using an uneven turn allocation pattern, especially in dealing with exam papers and written work, when she mainly told the answers for students to correct their mistakes. Therefore, the students were mainly listening passively, only those who were called upon would stand up and give the answers. Regarding the classroom learning

environment and climate, she compared the class with another class in an unfavourable way and tended to say ‘I think it’s quite easy’ after initiating a question. Moreover, the class size was big, with some students sitting too far from the blackboard and the screen, while the words on the screen were too small and changed too quickly. Dongmei stood in the front most of the time, rather than moving around. Therefore she failed to notice that students sitting at the back might have difficulty in seeing clearly what is on the board or the PPT slides.

8.1.2.3 Guiyun

Guiyun’s beliefs ranged from ‘some extent’ to a ‘great extent’ aligned with learner-centredness. However, her practices ranged from ‘a little’ to ‘some degree’ learner-centred. She embraced two aims which she considered contradictory to each other: ‘exams’ and ‘students’ ability to speak and use English’. She regarded teachers as role models who would exert great impact on students and believed that teachers’ mentality, attitudes and feelings to individual students would influence students greatly. She also maintained that teachers should not be authority figures but normal people equal to students who are also prone to making mistakes. She maintained that learning is facilitated in a relaxed, caring, trustful, respectful and encouraging learning environment with a sense of unity, mutual care and students’ participation and effort are valued, and that interpersonal relationships are an important factor determining whether teaching is successful.

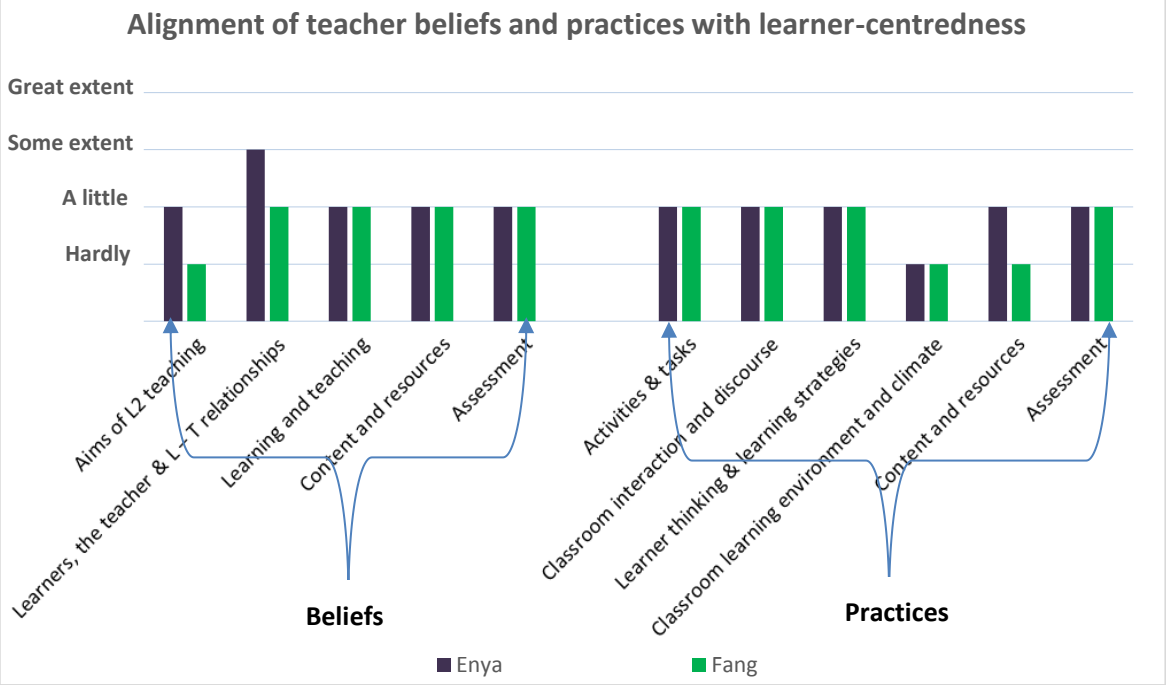
In practice, she was patient and kind to the students, demonstrating positive attitudes, respect and trust to the students, valuing their effort and participation, giving freedom to make choices, and taking responsibility regarding note-taking. She facilitated active learning by using activities such as reflection and writing out what the students had learnt in the previous lesson(s). These practices to some degree reflected her beliefs regarding the importance of relevance and interest in learning and the importance of students’ active participation in the learning process. Regarding the exam papers/results,

she facilitated the development of students' exam-taking ability rather than only covering the correct answers.

On the other hand, Guiyun mostly tended to directly ask students to answer rather than allowing time for contemplating the questions. Even though she occasionally asked students to discuss in pairs, the students mainly worked individually and she did not prompt them to or allow time for discussion. She occasionally used group work activities, but they were not well-organized. Guiyun also kept the students standing for a long time after they stood up to answer questions. She used a variety of resources as input, but the main function was to cover the content and prepare students for exams.

8.1.3 Enya and Fang

The low-alignment teachers were Enya and Fang, whose beliefs and practices were only to a little degree aligned with learner-centredness (see Figure 8.3).



Legend: the X axis represents categories of teacher beliefs and practices; the Y axis represents the extent of alignment to learner-centredness.

Figure 8.3 Alignment of beliefs and practices with learner-centredness – Enya & Fang

Enya's and Fang's beliefs were generally just to a little degree learner-centred, except for Enya's beliefs regarding learners, teacher and the L–T relationships, which were to some degree learner-centred and Fang's beliefs regarding aims of L2 teaching, which hardly aligned with learner-centredness at all. Their practices generally reflect their beliefs except for Enya's practices regarding classroom learning environment and climate and Fang's practices regarding assessment, and content and resources.

8.1.3.1 Enya

Enya prioritized exams over developing students' ability to speak and use English as aims of teaching. This belief was reflected in her overall teaching practice, as she mainly used grammar-translation activities. Occasionally she asked authentic questions and used pair work to engage students in meaningful practice of English, using oral presentations for students to speak in front of the class. However, these presentations were ineffective due to poor routines and expectations as well as her limited feedback to the presenters. The primary focus of Enya's teaching was to cover the content. Therefore, although she believed that learning was more effective when it was of personal relevance and interesting to learners, she mainly taught according to the textbook.

Regarding assessment, Enya maintained that teachers should constantly monitor students' progress so as to inform their parents about their children and gain the parents' support and cooperation. In practice, although she did use formative assessment to monitor students' performance and progress, the real function was not activated, especially with her limited feedback to students. She believed that learning was facilitated in a relaxed, caring, trustful, respectful and encouraging learning environment with a sense of unity, mutual care and valuing of students' participation and effort. She also believed that learning was facilitated when the teacher appreciated or accepted students for whom they were, catering for individual differences and supporting individual students to improve and experience success. However, her practice did not reflect such beliefs. Her predictable turn allocation and constant lack of

feedback or comments on students' performance or answers, and no enthusiasm or encouragement may have caused a sense of disengagement and boredom. Her dominant use of nomination prior to asking questions may have caused a sense of insecurity and pressure. Furthermore, the class rules, norms and expectations were not well-established regarding group-work, class interaction and activities, and following instructions. Thus the overall learning experience was only to a little degree learner-centred.

8.1.3.2 Fang

Fang's single aim of teaching for exams was highly reflected in her practice. She was doing the telling, mainly using passive, mechanistic, and grammar-translation activities and exercises. Learning may have seemed disconnected, irrelevant or uninteresting to students. She only occasionally asked questions to engage learners in meaningful practice and authentic use of language. Despite sometimes using pair/group work activities for students to interact and practice English, the organization of these activities made them seem unimportant and unnecessary.

She did not provide opportunities for students to discuss, negotiate or deepen their understanding, with the focus being mainly on linguistic competence rather than communicative competence. Learner thinking and learning ability was not facilitated except for some note-taking skills. Fang maintained that the textbooks and resources should be used flexibly and adaptively to facilitate learning, that assessment should be of learning and for learning, and that teachers should constantly monitor students' progress so as to adjust teaching accordingly. However, in practice, covering the content was her priority in teaching, regardless of whether the students had really understood what was being taught. No evidence was observed to suggest that she incorporated formative assessment in her teaching.

Furthermore, although Fang acknowledged the importance of catering for learners' individual differences and the importance of fostering a relaxed classroom climate in facilitating learning, she held a pessimistic view about the future learning outcomes of

students who had poor prior learning. Although she preferred to show her real self to the students and treat them equally as friends with understandings, she regarded teacher authority as a means of reducing discipline problems. These beliefs were reflected in her practice. For example, she used a critical tone when correcting students' pronunciation and was impatient when students could not give answers quickly.

8.1.4 Discussion

This meta-analysis of the alignment of teachers' beliefs and practices has provided an overview of where each teacher sits on the learner-centred continuum in relation to one another. Previous studies in China mainly suggest that 'the spirit of the 2001 National Curriculum Standards for secondary schools has not really been put into effect and that the EFL teachers' elementary goals of preparing students for various public exams and their role as knowledge-givers or transmitters through grammar-translation have remained unchanged (e.g. Li & Baldauf, 2011; Wang & Zhao, 2010; Yan & He, 2012; Zhang, 2007; Zhong, 2005). Nevertheless, the findings in this study suggest that change is taking place to varying degrees for different teachers. The findings were derived from systematic and detailed analysis based on a framework of learner-centredness, which was developed based on a comprehensive literature review and justification (see Section 3.6). The findings add to an understanding of the current uptake of the learner-centred philosophy by such teachers.

In terms of alignment between beliefs and practices, the meta-analysis shows that the beliefs of four teachers (Anli, Bailin, Enya, Fang) were highly consistent with their practices, while discrepancies existed between the beliefs and practices of the other three teachers (Chen, Dongmei, Guiyun). This finding, on the one hand, supports previous research studies which find a high alignment relationship between beliefs and practices (e.g. Kuzborska, 2011), and, on the other hand, also supports those studies that found inconsistencies between beliefs and practices (e.g. Basturkmen, Loewen & Ellis, 2004; Farrell & Lim, 2005; Baleghizadeh & Farshchi, 2009; Phipps & Borg, 2009).

This seemingly contradictory finding signifies the complex relationship between beliefs and practices, which provides justification for investigating reasons behind the consistencies or discrepancies between teacher beliefs and practices. To conduct such an investigation, teachers' voices are deemed necessary, as they are the ones who enact the curriculum, whatever the intended curriculum is. Further understandings of how teachers theorize their practices is addressed in Section 8.2 and will shed light on the change processes involving teachers' beliefs and practices, curriculum implementation and uptake process.

8.2 Factors that influence teachers' practices and change

Various factors have been identified as influencing teachers' practices and change. These include: teachers' perceptions about contextual factors (Section 8.2.1); teachers' prior conditioning to certain ways of teaching (Section 8.2.2); teachers' internal factors, including critical reflectiveness, openness and motivation for change or for trying alternative ways of teaching, as well as their perceptions about the acceptability and imperative of a practice (Section 8.2.3); and, lastly, external factors such as professional development (PD) and students' feedback (Section 8.4).

8.2.1 Teachers' perception of contextual factors

Teachers reported a range of contextual factors that they perceived had influenced their practices. These factors relate to exams, textbooks, time constraints, learners, class size and the constraints of the classroom physical environment.

8.2.1.1 Exam influence

Their perception of the importance and the nature of exams considerably influenced teachers' practices. For example, teachers commented that 'the exam covers every single detail of the textbook … focusing on the grammar rules' (Guiyun) and 'speaking ability of the students is not tested' (Fang). Therefore:

> … in the end, activities like dialogue, pair work which do not show in the exam, are likely to be omitted … no matter whether or not the textbook is good and practical, you have no choice but to teach accordingly rather than following the real purpose and expectation of the textbook (Guiyun).

Similarly, Dongmei put the exam above all else as it approached, changing her practice to respond to its closeness. For example, as she had not finished the content and was running short of time, she just forgot to provide feedback on the 'class report' activity. Chen openly denied the aim of teaching for the exams, but her practice proved to be distinctly exam-oriented as she spent a large proportion of time focusing on covering the answers of the exercises and homework, with her teaching being grammar-translation based. She explained that mid-term exams were approaching and the priority was to prepare students for the exam; therefore, the focus was more on written exercises.

This clearly indicates that teachers' perception about the importance and the nature of exams influenced their practice, partly contributing to some teachers' dominant use of the grammar-translation approach, focusing mainly on covering the content and written exercises, and having limited feedback or interaction with students.

8.2.1.2 The textbooks

The prescribed textbooks were regarded as being important as they were 'up-to-date' (Enya, Guiyun), 'practical'(Guiyun), 'related to students' life' (Enya), and paid attention to develop students' language and learning ability to speak, use and learn English (Bailin, Dongmei, Chen). Nevertheless, the textbooks were generally reported as covering too much content, being too difficult, and they did 'not match exams' (Dongmei) or students' prior learning (Anli, Fang). Teachers' use of the textbooks was influenced by their perception of exams. However, these particular textbooks were reported to have influenced teachers' practices. For example, Fang's use of pair/group work was 'influenced by the new textbooks which have a lot of activities that require pair or group work'. So when planning the lesson, she would notice this. She believed that 'every English teacher should know it and be using it, but as for how effective the

way they use it, that may vary'. Guiyun wished to 'experience the way of teaching advocated by the textbook', so in recent years, she 'tried to incorporate more listening and speaking activities'. It can therefore be concluded that teachers' perception of the textbooks influenced their practices, for example, regarding pair/group work and communication activities.

8.2.1.3 Time constraints

The teachers reported that one of the major concerns influencing their practices was time constraints, given the influence of the exams, the pre-determined schedule, the level of difficulty and the amount of content in the textbooks. Perceived time constraints was the main reason given by teachers for the short wait time for students to contemplate questions (Anli, Bailin), have class discussions (Guiyun) and internalize new knowledge (Fang). Time constraints also resulted in teachers not teaching as they planned. For example, Anli reflected that:

> … originally I planned to get the students to speak and talk about the grammar rules, but in the end I spoke more, especially when I felt that the students were not responding quickly and when it was close to the end of the lesson, running short of time (Anli).

On this occasion, Anli did not allow for student-initiated questioning or interaction, and later regretted not allowing the students to speak more. She said that sometimes when she was teaching, she might not be able to think or notice something, but when she observed others teaching, she would reflect and relate to her own teaching and think of better ways.

Similarly, Guiyun intended to have students discuss in pairs about how to change sentences into objective clauses, which relative words to choose and how. However, she had hardly given the instruction to discuss in pairs, when she started asking individual students questions. The reason for not waiting long enough was that she felt the need to hurry up to ensure the coverage of all the content.

Another time constraint resulted from teachers adopting a certain interaction and

discourse pattern. For example, Anli's use of the nomination-questioning pattern had an imbalanced turn allocation including the tendency to nominate students who raised their hand:

> Every time when I ask questions I will think about who is suitable to answer the question, as I have a feeling of time constraint and am afraid that if I call someone not raising hands, they may not know the answer, thus, I would have to wait. Therefore, it would waste a lot of time (Anli).

For another example, Guiyun dominantly used the teacher–whole class (T-WC) pattern – directly asking students to provide the answers rather than leaving them some time to think or discuss in pairs. Even though she occasionally asked students to discuss in pairs, she did leave them very little time to do so. Guiyun explained that she wished to catch up with time and cover all the content required and move on more quickly. It seemed quicker to give the answer straight away. Similarly, Enya said that she only wished to 'move on quickly and get more students to stand up and read the dialogue to her' and so generally just skipped feedback – not giving any comments or feedback and not praising students.

Another time constraint was a reason given to explain why teachers stuck to traditional practices rather than trying out alternative innovative ways. For example, Fang had the opportunity to observe others teaching and had seen some class activities that really engaged students. However, afterwards she thought 'these activities are not suitable for my own class, as they seem to waste time', worrying that if she used a lot of these activities, she would not be able to finish her content. Therefore, she only used one or two activities or games occasionally.

Time constraints did not always influence teachers' practices in a negative way. For example, Anli explained that due to the time constraint and the class size, it was impossible for the students to recite the text to her individually, so she organized a group leader to be in charge of a group ensuring all group members had finished the reciting task. The group leader recited to the teacher directly before they start managing

their group. Anli decided to have different people as group leaders for different units, so that everyone would act as group leader at least once in a semester and would have an opportunity to recite the text to her. Bailin's efficient practice regarding dealing with exam papers was another positive outcome due to time constraint. She asked students to do self-reflection and correct mistakes on the exam papers at home and then show the paper to their parents. In class she did not spend time explaining the paper question-by-question, but asked students to point out questions that they still did not understand and then asked other students to explain the questions.

In summary, time constraints were reported to have influenced teachers' practices in a number of ways, but not always negatively.

8.2.1.4 Class size

The large class size (37–58) was generally regarded as a constraint for language classes, making it challenging for teachers to give individual attention or to interact with students. This is elaborated by Anli:

> I once required them to record their voice reading the texts or words on tapes on the weekends so that I could listen and give them individual feedback. I only continued for one semester and soon realized it was impractical, as there were too many students and I could not afford the time to listen to each of their recordings properly (Anli).

She further explained that:

> Some students stumbled over the answers when asked to stand, you could not simply ask them to sit down and move on, but have to encourage them to open their mouth, speaking little is better than nothing. Given the class size, if you wait too long, the class time will run out soon (Anli).

Therefore, Anli's solution was using pair/group work to engage students in more practice and interaction, saying that:

> It is impossible to get each of them stand up and speak English in one class due to the class size and time constraint (Anli).

Despite this, Anli commented that:

> … even though pair and group work could help, still not many students can stand up and speak or answer, a turn is limited for each individual (Anli).

Therefore, large class sizes proved to be a major influence that constrained teachers' practices and students' learning and participation opportunities.

8.2.1.5 Learner factors

Learners' reactions and feelings were reported to have influenced teachers' practice. For example, Anli's tendency to allocate turns to those students who raised hands was influenced by her concern about students' feelings.

> I am afraid that if I do not call those who often raise hands, they would be discouraged, thinking that as the teacher would not call me, there is no need to raise my hand - as this really happened before (Anli).

As another example, Guiyun asked students to give feedback on a student's composition (see Excerpt 6.16). The students, however, were unwilling to open their mouths and Guiyun simply gave up and gave feedback herself. She explained that 'the students in this class are generally shy and a bit timid, dare not to speak much'. She was more concerned about 'the flow of the class', and therefore gave up prompting students to give feedback. Teachers also explained that their not expanding on the content in the textbooks (Guiyun) or rushing to cover the content (Fang) was due to students' poor prior learning in primary school and general low-level of English ability.

Therefore, teachers' perceptions about the learners were identified to have influenced their practices regarding their uneven turn allocation, use of pair work, not expanding on the textbooks and rushing to cover the content to be taught.

8.2.1.6 Constraints of the classroom's physical environment

The physical environment of the classroom was observed and reported to be unfavourable for language learning, with a large group of students sitting in the classroom packed with tables and desks in rows. The flexibility of teachers to rearrange the seating and organize class activities was limited. For example, Dongmei stood in the front on the classroom platform most of the time, rather than moving around, as 'the

packed classroom makes it hard to move around'. She felt that standing on the platform she could 'monitor students better' as she could see better. Regarding not seating students in pairs, she explained that:

> … Their class teacher arranged them to sit individually, it is not easy to ask them to move the desks and chairs between classes every day (Dongmei).

The same comment about organizing group work was made by Anli. Originally she wanted to have set groups so that they could be awarded points for their group performance, progress or collaboration, a practice she considered effective to make them interested and actively engaged in learning as she had observed on her PD visits to schools in other cities and in training workshops. However, due to the weekly rotating of seats, Anli could not have set groups sitting close to one another. Therefore, 'the groups were not set; they form a temporary group of twos or fours in class', pointing out that 'what is applicable in small classes may not be applicable in big classes'.

The physical environment was particularly unfavourable in Chen's classroom. It was not a typical classroom, but used to be a lecture hall with a stepped floor and fixed chairs and desks with wide space between rows (see Section 5.1). 48 students sat in rows of four in the middle section with one student in a row in the left and right sections of the hall. The long distance between the front blackboard and the last row of the students meant that the teacher was far away from the last rows and simply could not notice what was going on. This situation made it hard to manage the class, so Chen seemed to be fighting to keep control, let alone focus on the quality of teaching. This classroom configuration might partly explain why individual students were not attended to and why Chen failed to seize opportunities to allow so-called problem students to demonstrate their progress and thereby encourage them appropriately. Her approach of deducting points for disciplinary purposes reveals a sense of vulnerability, forming a striking contrast to her confidence and capability shown in the interview data. In addition, the fact that she had to travel between two buildings far away from each other within the ten minute break between classes added to the difficulty for her teaching and

management of the class, leaving her no time to communicate with students:

> … need to pack up immediately and rush to the next class in the next building, I cannot delay even for two minutes, or I will be late for the next class, where I still need to switch on the multimedia devices and plug in my removable disk (Chen).

Overall, the physical environment of the classrooms was generally considered unfavourable, constraining teachers' practices regarding the organization of pair/group work, free movement of students and teachers, maintaining the engagement and attention of students, and communication and interaction with individual students.

In summary, the contextual factors found to have influenced teachers' practices are exams, textbooks, time constraints, learner factors, class size and classroom physical environment. These factors were perceived and responded to differently by different teachers, influenced by each teacher's socio-cultural and historical background and experiences. Besides their perceptions of contextual factors, teachers also gave some other explanations for their practices. Some of the explanations revealed that teachers' were conditioned to a certain way of teaching.

8.2.2 Conditioned to a certain way of practice

Teachers' explanations for their practices reveal that they were conditioned to a certain way of practice as influenced by the traditional norms and practices. Some of their practices were directly influenced by apprentice observation as English learners or observation of their colleagues' practices. Some teachers were not aware of certain of their practices until pointed out in the interview. Some practices were carried out with good intentions, even if not effective. These variations are now detailed.

8.2.2.1 Apprentice observation and colleague influence

Apprentice observation and colleague influence was a major reason that influenced teachers' practices. As they reported, some practices were learnt early in their schooling from their English teachers or later from observing other English teachers. For example, Enya predominantly used the T-1ST interaction pattern and the predictive turn

allocation of having students stand up one-by-one or group-by-group to report answers. She explained that:

> I am used to this way of teaching because my English teachers also did this when I was a student (Enya).

For another example, Fang dominated the class talking time, being the one to tell and explain the difficult and important points, while students sat passively, listened quietly and took notes. Fang explained that:

> I observed this kind of teaching in other teachers' classes and gradually developed this kind of teaching style and have been teaching like this for many years (Fang).

Regarding the lack of true communication and interaction between the teacher and the learners, and among the learners in Chen's class, she considered it 'the way of teaching big classes' and she was 'not aware of other forms of teaching and interaction'. Regarding her not attending to what the students were really doing and thinking, assuming they were doing as required and they are learning what was taught, Chen reflected that this is her 'normal way of interaction all these years'.

The data thus indicate that, under the influence of traditional ways of teaching, teachers were conditioned to certain practices. Even though they might hold good beliefs or have good intentions, they were not aware of the low efficiency of certain of their practices. This will be explained in the next subsection.

8.2.2.2 Good intention with little effectiveness

Another theme identified was good intention with little effectiveness in terms of the definition presented in Section 2.2.3, whereby to be effective a practice must facilitate active thinking, participation; be relevant, meaningful, and engaging to learners; and maximize opportunities for interaction and for language input, practice and output. For example, Anli occasionally used a predictable turn allocation pattern, such as reading words or sentences one-by-one or group-by-group according to the seating arrangement. She explained that she wanted to make sure that each student had at least an opportunity

to stand up and answer questions. Her intention was good – to provide equal opportunities. However, she did not realize the possible drawbacks and lack of time efficiency of such an interaction pattern in facilitating learning and thinking. Similarly, Chen used a great deal of predictable turn allocation patterns one-by-one horizontally, which she had observed from her colleague and considered 'a good way to ensure that every student can get a turn to stand up and report an answer'. On reflection, she realized that students became disengaged when she asked them to take turns to stand up and provide answers to questions. Her solution was to occasionally ask questions to students sitting at the other end of the classroom to make sure they were listening or to prompt them to pay attention. Similarly, using the same pattern, Enya explained that her intention was to let every student have a turn to stand up and report the answer, but she did not notice that students sitting far away were not paying attention.

For another example, Enya showed the video of the Lion King with good intention to:

> … create an English environment, hoping such practice can increase students' interests or making the ones who are not interested in English become interested (Enya)

However, she did not want to 'put extra burden to students', so she did not have any follow-up discussion or conversation about the video. She did not think about the effectiveness and meaningfulness of the activity, despite the effort that she had put into preparation.

This analysis reveals that due to being conditioned to a certain way of teaching, despite having good intention aligned with learner-centredness, the teachers' practices were not always as effective as they expected. Furthermore, teachers were sometimes unaware of some of their practices.

8.2.2.3 Lack of awareness of certain practices

Being unaware of some of their practices was a theme identified in teachers' final interview explanations. For example, Dongmei was unaware of her frequent wording of 'I think it's quite easy' and Guiyun was unaware of keeping students standing for a long

time after they stood up to answer questions. In an activity guessing who the figures in pictures were, Enya nominated students to stand up and guess, but some students stood up a few times while others were never called on. She reflected that she did not realize it and only wished to call on as many students as possible to participate. Regarding her standing in the front most of the time, Fang said that she never realized it either. Regarding not letting students ask questions, Anli admitted that she was not aware of it, admitting that sometimes when she was teaching, she might not think or notice everything. These practices could be changed easily once identified or pointed out. Nevertheless, it is hard for teachers to examine closely their own practices especially when it has become a habit.

In summary, the teachers were conditioned to a certain ways of teaching due to traditional norms and practices they experienced as students and the habits of teaching they developed over the years. Some practices were carried out as routines, others unconsciously, and others with good intention regardless of their effectiveness. This conditioning highlights the importance of factors that influence teacher change.

8.2.3 Factors that influence teacher change and curriculum take-up

Various factors influenced teacher change, including external factors – PD, artefacts and students' feedback and/or intervention, and internal factors – teachers' reflectiveness, the teachers' openness to adopt alternative practices or take others' advice, motivation for change, and their perception about the applicability and imperative of adopting new practices.

8.2.3.1 External factors

Some external factors which influenced teacher change included PD, artefacts, and students' feedback and/or intervention. For example, Anli's practice regarding teaching reading comprehension (see Section 5.5) was influenced by the *National Training* professional development program. She recalled that she used to find it challenging to teach reading comprehension. She asked 'students to listen to the passage once, then I

translate it sentence by sentence to the students, asking them to underline important phrases or key points'. In the end, 'the students could not remember and many students were falling asleep'. Therefore, she used to be 'afraid of teaching reading comprehension'. In the training program, the teacher educator demonstrated an approach with a strong emphasis on the development of students' reading skills and strategies. Consequently, Anli found it easy to put into practice. She tried these ways and found them successful, so she continued teaching in this way. Such National Training programs occur on a regular basis, but teachers are selected to attend the programs and not all gain access.

Artefacts like books and curriculum documents provided an affordance for teacher development. For example, Dongmei's practice of teaching reading comprehension was originally similar to Anli's and then she read books about teaching reading comprehension. She tried the suggestions she read in her classes which were effective in seizing students' interest and in training students' skills of doing reading comprehension in exams.

Another important factor influencing teacher change was students' feedback and/or intervention. For example, Bailin's choice to involve students in nominating the next student was influenced by her students. She explained that once a student asked her to let him nominate the next student and she agreed. She recalled that immediately the whole class became more active and more students raised their hands to be nominated. Even the ones who were generally shy became more active and more willing to participate.

8.2.3.2 Internal factors

Internal factors that were identified as influencing teacher change include teachers' reflectiveness, openness to adopt alternative practices, their motivation for change, and their perception about the applicability and imperative of adopting a practice.

8.2.3.3 Teachers' reflectiveness

Teachers' constant reflection on their own practice and traditional practices was an important factor influencing teachers' practices. Although teachers may know or believe in something, they may not necessarily put it into practice unless they take a critical stance to reflect on their existing practices. For example, although Anli espoused the belief that teachers should let learners be more active and do more speaking, as influenced by her schooling experience and her father, her reflection on practice prompted her to try something different. For example, the little teacher activity (see Section 5.3.1) was a direct result of Anli's reflection on her practice and her constant exploration for better ways to teach and 'develop students' potential or let students demonstrate their ability'. Previously, teaching new words was time consuming, with her doing all the speaking and the students not paying attention to the words that she had not taught in class. As she reflected, she decided to try something different.

> Ever since the beginning of this semester, I asked whether the students could try to preview and explain words in class and they said they could and they really did well. Ever since using this activity, I have saved a lot of time teaching new words, as the students had already previewed so well at home and I only needed to add a little to what students explained about a word. And the students could remember the words even before the words were taught in class. (Anli)

Thanks to her father's advice on her first day of teaching, Anli reported reflecting on her teaching nearly after each lesson, even if only for a few minutes, and that this would enable her to do better in the next lesson. Nevertheless, Anli also pointed out that sometimes she was too busy to do the reflection.

As another example, Bailin's practice of paying attention to skills and ability development – for example, in dealing with exam questions – was driven by her beliefs about the importance of students' ability (see Section 4.1.3). This practice resulted from her reflecting on and questioning the traditional projection of a good student and the traditional ways of teaching for exams only in preparing a student for future life, asserting that teachers should change their perspectives and not only focus on grades but

also the overall ability of a person as an agent of societal change. Her experience then told her that:

> Developing students' ability to solve questions and problems early in their study will benefit them greatly … [as] the thinking process and ability is transferable to the learning of other subjects (Bailin).

Guiyun's practice of asking students at the beginning of each lesson to reflect, recall and write out important, interesting or difficult points for revision (see Section 5.2.1) was influenced by her critical reflection of her usual practices of doing all the speaking and explaining. She explained that with the content increasing, it became impractical and inefficient for her to be the only one to tell and explain while students took notes, which would not arouse students' interest to study English. Therefore, she thought of this method upon the end of the previous semester. After she tried this method, she felt it was effective as students had become more active in reviewing and reflecting on what they liked or found difficult, so she continued with it. This shows that reflection on successful or unsuccessful practices, traditional practices and norms may lead teachers to try out alternative practices and/or to a change in their belief system, which resonates with the findings of other studies (e.g. Breen et al., 2001; Farrell & Ives, 2015).

In comparison, lack of reflection seemed a reason for teachers to remain unchanged or hardly changed. For example, Fang's routine was to have a revision lesson at the end of each unit, when she organized many notes for students to copy silently for a long time. Fang did not organize other activities or interact with students to help them internalize the knowledge and maximize learning. She admitted that she 'never thought until asked the question as to how much the students really learnt' from her teaching in this way. Although she observed some good teaching practices, she 'didn't really think about how to apply' in her own class, only thinking about covering the content first, which she thinks is a more traditional approach of teaching. She considered herself as trying her best and working hard to teach, so 'if students did not learn well, it should be their problem'. This explained her being impatient when students were not responding well.

These examples indicate that teachers' reflectiveness influenced how they taught and whether change was likely to take place.

8.2.3.4 Teachers' openness and motivation to change

Teachers' openness and motivation to change influenced how reflective they were and how they responded to and perceived these external factors discussed above. For example, there was variation in their perception of and response to the PD programs regarding the 2001/2011 reform and the Curriculum Standards. Some of them found the reforms resonated with their own beliefs, while others found them impractical. Some found the PD training useful and others found it disconnected to their classroom teaching.

> When the new version was released, I attended the National PD program in which a teacher coming back from overseas explained something about it. I found his explanation very useful and the online resources from websites he introduced were very useful as well (Bailin).
>
> I attended a PD training explaining the new curriculum standard in the first year of my teaching. I also asked for a copy and read about it later on (Chen)
>
> I heard about it in some PD training, but never read the curriculum standard itself, so do not know much about it (Enya).
>
> I know a little … I know what the exams would be about (Fang).
>
> There were trainings about it but at that time we were very resistant, as we think it [learner-centredness] is not practical. We only wanted to find out about the changes to the exams. Some experts explained it, but I felt I did not learn much as what they said was disconnected from our teaching (Guiyun)

Similarly the effect of the artefacts was influenced by teachers' motivation and openness to change. For example, regarding the curriculum documents, some teachers obtained a copy of the Curriculum Standards to read, while others never read it. Teachers' openness to adopt alternative practices or to take others' advice, and their motivation for change influenced teachers' practices and eventually teacher change. For example, Bailin's openness to students' suggestions led her to allow students to nominate other students in classroom interaction and activities. Guiyun's dilemma and feeling of anguish for not teaching the way she wished and her reflectiveness were all

influenced by her personal value of doing her best to help the students. This powerful intrinsic motivation kept her seeking and trying alternative ways of teaching even nearing retiring age.

By contrast, a lack of motivation to change influenced teachers' reflectiveness and possibility to change. This is well-illustrated in regard to Fang, whose lack of motivation for change was influenced by a range of immediate contextual factors. She was already a well-established teacher and her exam-oriented practices and beliefs had not previously been questioned and challenged. Despite having had opportunities to attend a range of PD programs and to witness some alternative teaching practices which seemed effective and interesting, she seemed to lack motivation or understanding of the imperative to try these out or change her practices. These factors were coupled with her perception of the inapplicability of the observed practices. She saw that 'the students were highly active in some classes'. However, she 'didn't apply the activities' in her own class due to the reason that she 'always felt the activities would take a lot of time'. Her further explanation revealed that she did not feel it imperative to adopt alternative ways of teaching:

> … teaching in a more learner-centred way was mentioned earlier in PD programs, but I rarely thought about how to use it and didn't really put into practice … there are some activities in the teaching reference book which I sometimes adopt, but not often (Fang).

Thus, she hardly changed in the process of curriculum reform.

In summary, it is clear that the teachers' reflectiveness and various internal and external factors influenced possibilities for teacher change. Internal factors included reflectiveness regarding traditional practices and their own practices, norms and assumptions, their openness to alternative practices and to others' advice, their motivation for adopting a practice or for change, as well as their perception about the applicability and imperative of adopting a new practice. External factors included the PD training they received, artefacts such as books and Curriculum Standards, and students' feedback/intervention. These factors were dynamic and interactive with one

another, which then influenced the likelihood of teacher change.

8.2.4 Discussion

The analysis in this section has also uncovered various factors that influence teachers' beliefs and practices and mediate the relationship between them. Contextual factors were perceived and responded to differently by different teachers, as influenced by individual teachers' background, experience and the context, especially the particular immediate context in which they found themselves. Taking Chen as an example, she openly denied the aim of teaching for exams and perceived the content and pace as flexible and adjustable, prioritizing real understanding over covering the content. However, in the observed classes, she devoted a great amount of time to focusing on explaining and checking the answers of written exercises and homework. Her reasons for preparing students for the approaching exam contradicted the beliefs about aims of teaching that she previously expressed.

The contradiction might be explained by the fact that Chen had just transferred to this school one month before she became a research participant. She was still in the transition period, not knowing the school and the context well. In this situation, the pressure to be recognized or to establish herself as a good teacher in the new school might have pushed her to focus on the exams only, despite being against her belief about the aims of teaching. Her exam results would be what the school, the students and the parents care about and would be used to judge her effectiveness. Also, as she was teaching in a classroom with extremely unfavourable conditions, Chen did not have much control over her practice and struggled to find better ways that were aligned with the teaching culture and norms in the school, about which she was still learning. Thus she just implemented various practices she observed from colleagues in the school. For example, the predictable turn allocation pattern of having students stand up one-by-one to give an answer, each according to their seating arrangement. This clearly indicates that teachers' practices need to be understood in their particular context(s) and how they

find themselves in such context(s) – a field related to teacher identity, which Borg & Al-Busaidi (2012) and Kubanyiova and Feryok (2015) consider an important expansion of teacher cognition research.

Besides the influence on teachers' practice of their perception of contextual factors, teachers were to some degree conditioned to certain practices. This finding can be well explained by Crookes' (2015) comment that:

> Ideas of mainstream culture, often pervasive, allow most people few alternative ways of thinking about any phenomenon or issue (and thus inhibit active forms of social action or change to improve conditions) (p. 490).

Thus, this finding helps to explain why some teachers remained traditional or their practices were less aligned with learner-centredness as compared to their beliefs. Given that teachers are conditioned to a certain way of teaching, it is deemed challenging to change their beliefs and practices.

Reflection on their own practices and traditional practices caused disequilibrium in the teachers' thinking, which pushed them to explore and search for alternative ways of teaching or solutions to their problems or answers to their queries. This was illustrated by Anli's teaching of new words with the 'Little Teacher' activity and Guiyun's revision process with students' reflection and writing important or difficult points on the board. Teachers' reflectiveness was influenced by their own background, experience and motivation. For example, Guiyun's reflectiveness was influenced by her motivation to improve to do her best to help the students, a personal value she embraced. By contrast, some teachers seemed to lack reflection and sat comfortably within their traditional and established practices; their beliefs and practices had never been challenged before. These findings resonate with Senior's (2006) remark that not many teachers 'have the inclination to sit down and reflect on the reasons that underlie their classroom decision making' (p. 247). However, as Pennycook (2001) asserts, unless a form of teaching or theorizing is problematized and the teacher is reflexive and willing to critically inspect their own assumptions, change is not likely to take place. The

findings raise a concern about the effectiveness of external interventions in triggering and supporting teachers' reflection and change. Without effective external intervention, teachers like Fang would likely remain unchanged.

The teachers' openness to adopt alternative practices and motivation to change also influenced their possibility of changing. As Fullan (2007) points out, 'behaviours and emotions change before beliefs – we need to act in a new way before we get insights and feelings related to new beliefs', until teachers try out a certain practice and experience the difference for themselves, it would be unlikely that sustainable changes will take place (p. 41). The internal factors that influence teacher change form a dynamic and interactive relationship with one another. For example, Fang's lack of motivation to change influenced her perception about the imperatives of the new practices. Guiyun's active motivation to change drove her to search for alternative practices. Such internal factors then interact with external factors, influencing the possibility for teacher change.

The effectiveness of the external factors depends on who the intervening agent is and the forms and nature of the intervention. The agent of the external intervention and feedback could be students, parents, colleagues, school leaders or teacher educators. The power relation of the agent with the teacher might be an important factor influencing teacher change, but not always in direct correlation. In Bailin's case, allowing students to nominate the next student was a suggestion by a student, which could be ignored or denied easily. The other factor that might influence the effectiveness of external intervention relates to the nature and forms of the intervention. The PD programs can be one-off and random or sustained and systematic. Besides such differences, effectiveness depends on whether the PD programs facilitate 'knowing about' only or 'knowing why' and 'knowing how' as well, and whether they are mainly theoretical or practical/experiential, or both. These factors interact with the internal factors previously discussed, as well as influencing teachers' perception about the applicability and imperative of adopting change.

8.3 Chapter summary

This chapter has connected teachers' beliefs, practices and the concept of learner-centredness, presenting an overview to show both the alignment of teachers' beliefs with their practices and the alignment of these practices with learner-centredness. The findings reveal both consistencies and discrepancies between teachers' beliefs and practices in regard to learner-centredness. This chapter has also identified factors that influenced teachers' practices, change and curriculum take-up, drawing on the post-observation stimulated recall interview data and overall contextual information data gathered throughout the data collection process. Teachers' perceptions of the contextual factors that influence their practices partly explain the discrepancies between their practices and beliefs. Other factors identified to influence the discrepancies were that teachers were conditioned to a certain way of teaching, and therefore unaware of certain practices, or not questioning the effectiveness of their practices in realizing their intended outcomes. Two sets of factors were identified to have vital influence on teacher change: the background and history of each teacher and the broader social-cultural, educational and school context.

Chapter 9 Conclusion

The chapter first provides a conclusion of this study on the learner-centredness of Chinese secondary EFL teachers' beliefs and practices (Section 9.1). This is followed by a conceptualization of the relationship between teacher beliefs and practices as derived from the overall findings (Section 9.2). Next is an examination of the contributions of the study to literature, research and practice related to learner-centredness, L2 teaching, research on L2 teachers and teaching (Section 9.3). There follows a discussion of the implications of the present research respectively for second-language (L2) teachers, teacher educators and teacher education, school leaders and policy makers, curriculum reform and policy processes, and methodological implications (Section 9.4). The limitations of this study are then reviewed, and recommendations made for future research (Sections 9.7 & 9.8).

9.1 Conclusion of this study

Given the curriculum reform towards learner-centred philosophy in China, this research study has aimed to understand how learner-centredness is evident in teachers' beliefs and how these beliefs align with their classroom teaching practices. This qualitative interpretive study adopted a multiple-case study design involving seven teachers in two secondary schools in a city in the Southwest of China. Primary data collection methods included: individual semi-structured pre-observation interviews, five lesson observations for each teacher, conversations after each observation and final individual stimulated-recall interviews. This data was complemented by school documents, field notes and research diaries. The combination of these methods resulted in a comprehensive dataset encompassing the teachers' overall educational beliefs, factors influencing their beliefs, their classroom practices, their explanation for their practices, socio-cultural contexts of the school and insights into the curriculum policy implementation.

A ‘framework of learner-centredness’ was developed to analyze the extent to which the teachers’ beliefs and practices were learner-centred. The categories of beliefs in this framework were informed by five themes which emerged from the data about teachers’ beliefs, while the categories of teacher practices were six dimensions of the L2 classroom as conceptualized in Section 2.2. These categories were then used to synthesize learner-centred theories and practices as identified in the literature review, leading to the generation of the framework and the associated series of matrices for mapping learner-centred teacher beliefs and practices.

The findings have been presented and discussed in five data chapters: teachers’ educational beliefs and factors influencing their beliefs (Chapter 4), teachers’ classroom practices (Chapters 5-7), and factors influencing their practices, alignment with learner-centredness and stated beliefs, and teacher change (Chapter 8). Teachers’ beliefs and practices were mapped against the framework of learner-centredness. The seven teachers could be placed on a learner-centred continuum, with two of them embracing beliefs and demonstrating practices that were to ‘a great extent’ learner-centred, two teachers being to ‘a little extent’ learner-centred, and three in between. Teachers’ beliefs were positively linked to their practices. Four teachers’ beliefs were consistent with their practices while three teachers’ beliefs were inconsistent with their practices as their beliefs were more aligned with learner-centredness than their practices were.

Teachers’ beliefs are influenced and mediated by a complex process, leading to teachers’ ‘theories of practice’ underpinning their practices. These theories are ‘vehicles for explanation, prediction, or control’ (Argyris & Schön 1974, p. 5). ‘All humans, whether they are conscious of it or not, operate according to thousands of theories to explain their experience, predict future events, and control outcomes in various situations’ (Houchens & Keedy, 2009, p. 50). The next section presents a conceptualization of the relationship between teacher beliefs and practices in context.

9.2 Conceptualization of the relationship between teacher beliefs and practices

Based on the findings of the previous chapters, the dynamic relationship between teacher beliefs and practices is conceptualized in Figure 9.1 in terms of teachers' theories of practice.

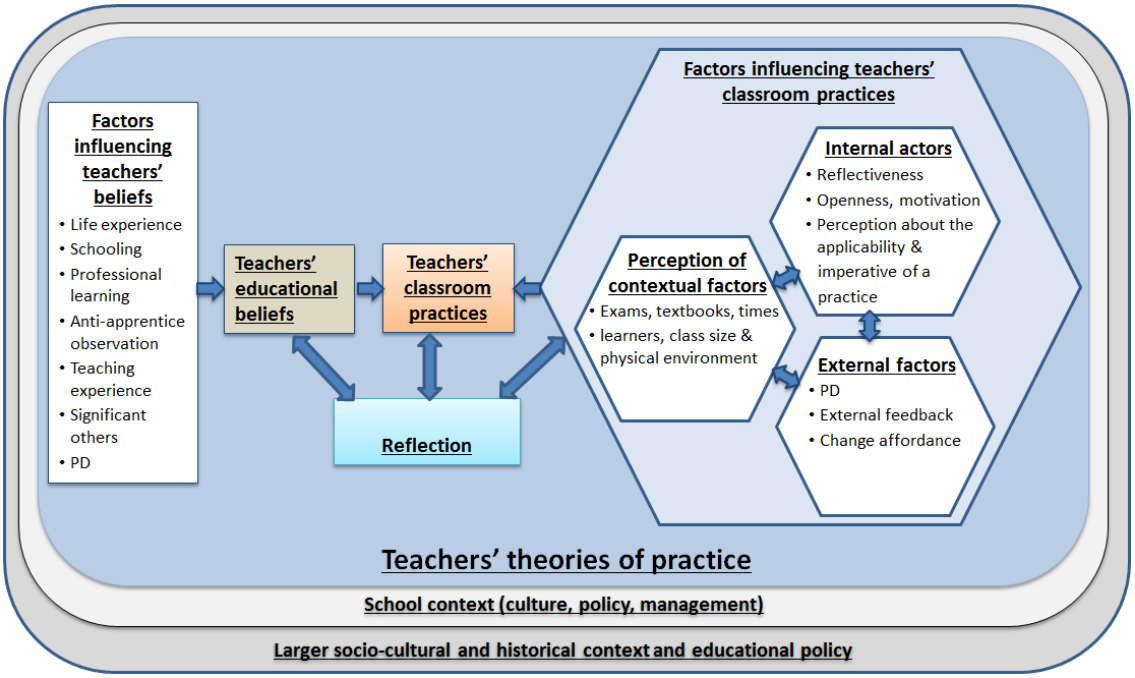


Figure 9.1 Conceptualization of the dynamic relationship between teacher beliefs and practices

Teachers develop various educational beliefs influenced by a range of factors, notably their life experience, schooling, professional learning, anti-apprentice observation, past teaching experience, significant others and PD. All of these are themselves shaped by the larger socio-cultural and historical context, and filtered through educational policy and the school context. Teachers are thus conditioned to certain ways of teaching influenced by traditional norms and practices, apprentice observation and colleague influences. Teacher beliefs then shape what teachers do in class, which is also shaped by other factors influencing their practices: their perception of contextual factors, as well as internal and external factors (see Chapter 8). At various times following the classroom experience, the teacher typically engages in some degree of reflection, which is both shaped by and shapes further practice as well as further development of educational beliefs.

To understand how change might come about in teachers' theories of practice the concept of reflection is central, along with its close links to teachers' educational beliefs, their actual classroom practices, and the factors influencing their practices. Given that teachers are to some extent conditioned to certain ways of teaching, factors influencing their practice are critical for teacher development and change. Change in teachers' beliefs is influenced and mediated by reflection incorporating the interaction of three sets of factors, namely: 1) teachers' perception about contextual factors; 2) internal factors including teachers' reflectiveness, openness, motivation and their perception about the applicability and imperative of a practice; and 3) external factors including PD training, stakeholder feedback, and change affordance such as resources and support. This complex interaction process is dynamic, non-linear and contextually dependent. Among internal factors, teachers' reflectiveness plays a vital role. Whether or not teachers question, reflect and challenge the traditional or routinized practices makes a difference to their own practices. Reflection might cause disequilibrium in teachers, who then might seek for and try out alternative and more effective practices. Teachers' motivation to change influences their reflectiveness and openness.

Within the external factors, professional development opportunities play a pivotal role in determining how new knowledge and ideas are taken up and implemented by teachers. The nature and forms of PD can be framed by:

- the nature of the intervention:
  - whether facilitating 'knowing about', 'knowing why' or 'knowing how'
  - whether one-off and random or sustained and systematic
- the form of the PD – theoretical and lecturing, or practical, experiential and participatory.

These parameters shape the effectiveness of PD in influencing teacher beliefs and practices. The second factor, external feedback, especially stakeholder feedback may trigger reflection, provide or demand alternative ways of thinking and practices, and thus may lead to teacher change. The effectiveness of external feedback may be influenced by the power relationship of the feedback provider and the teacher. Finally,

affordance for change such as resources, time, support and even incentives, together with PD and external feedback, interact with the internal factors, influencing teachers' perceptions about the applicability and imperative of a practice, and thus the possibility for sustainable change to take place.

The three sets of factors interact with one another and, through reflection, potentially mediate teachers' beliefs, leading to belief change and the ongoing development of teachers' theories of practice. The complex interaction of these factors, as well as the processes of reflection and belief change, is influenced by the school context and the larger socio-cultural and historical context(s).

9.3 Contributions

This study has provided a comprehensive understanding of seven Chinese secondary EFL teachers' beliefs and practices in the context of learner-centred curriculum reform. It has revealed the complex nature of the curriculum reform, identifying the factors that directly influence beliefs and factors directly influence practice and the relationship between beliefs and practices. While establishing an empirical base with a set of data unique to the Chinese school EFL context to inform curriculum innovation and policy direction, this study also experimented new ways of researching teacher cognition. Apart from these, this study contributes to the research literature and to professional knowledge in the following ways.

First, while previous research studies have reported the gaps between the intended and enacted curriculum or the gaps between teachers' beliefs and the goals of the curriculum innovation (Goh, Zhang, Ng & Goh, 2005; Zhang & Liu, 2014), the findings of this study have provided detailed evidence on the current status of the curriculum implementation and the uptake of learner-centred (LC) philosophy among these teachers. It also provides an in-depth understanding of the factors that influence teacher beliefs and practices, and the discrepancies between these two, helping explain phenomena regarding the success and failure of curriculum implementation.

A second contribution is the framework of learner-centredness, which synthesizes and interprets literature about theories and practices related to learner-centredness. This framework, together with the associated matrices for the mapping of learner-centredness of teachers' practices and beliefs, makes learner-centred philosophy accessible to L2 teachers and teacher educators, whilst also providing researchers with an analytic tool for the investigation of learner-centredness in teacher beliefs and practices. The framework and its associated matrices could be used as a tool in the following ways:

- for self–evaluation, diagnosis and reflection among teachers
- for teacher educators to analyze and diagnose trainee teachers' development needs
- for teacher educators to use as a framework for designing and planning their PD programs
- for evaluation of the implementation of learner-centred curriculum
- as resources to advance teachers' and teacher educators' understanding of the learner-centred philosophy.

A third contribution is the learner-centred conceptualization of the L2classroom (Figure 2.1), which captures the complex, dynamic and interactive relationships of seven key dimensions of a classroom. It provides a holistic perspective and framework for L2 classroom research. Using it has enabled the analysis of the teachers' classroom teaching practices in this study to be of a comprehensive scale, which could inform L2 teaching practices in China and beyond. The detailed analysis of classroom teaching and the excerpts from the classroom observation data could be adapted and used in L2 teacher professional development programs or research.

Fourth, the findings of this study have led to a conceptualization of the relationship between teacher beliefs and practices, which captures the dynamic interactive relationship of key factors that influence the alignment or misalignment of teachers' practices with their beliefs, and factors that influence teacher change and development. This conceptualization provides a framework for investigating teacher beliefs and

practices, which can also inform policy and curriculum decision making, research and practices relevant to teacher professional development.

9.4 Implications

This research study and the findings and conclusions have multiple implications regarding L2 teachers, teacher educators, PD programs, school leaders, policy and curriculum reform, and research methodology.

9.4.1 Implications for L2 teachers

The holistic conceptualization and analysis of the L2 classroom highlight the fact that L2 teaching is complex and highly demanding. To optimize learning opportunities and ensure effective teaching and learning take place, all these dimensions need to be taken into consideration. Problems or weaknesses in one aspect will influence the overall effectiveness of learning and teaching. Therefore, teachers need to develop their expertise with a comprehensive understanding and increased knowledge about the classroom teaching process. In other words, teachers need to develop their knowledge of these different dimensions and know why these are important, so as to take all dimensions into consideration in planning and teaching.

Embracing exams as an aim does not necessarily mean teaching for exams only. What needs to be challenged and reflected upon is the traditional practice and how it projects students for future learning and life, as well as the traditional projection of good teachers and good students. Teachers are not tools to transmit curriculum, but rather are active agents constantly making decisions, mediating the curriculum and contextual constraints, responding to the needs of the students, and eventually making a difference in students' lives.

This study has pointed to the importance of teachers' reflectiveness, which is 'of considerable value as a process of consciousness raising and enhancing understanding' (Walsh, 2006, p. 127). Without reflection, 'teaching decisions often are made on

pragmatic trial-and-error grounds' (Fullan, 2007, p. 24). This view is endorsed in the conceptualization of the dynamic relationship between teacher beliefs and practices (Figure 9.1), where reflection is central.

9.4.2 Implications for teacher educators and teacher education

Giving teachers voices to theorize their actual practices has enabled this study to identify factors that influence teacher practices, beliefs and change. This study has also highlighted the contextually dependent nature of teachers' work, endorsing the view that research on teachers, classroom teaching and curriculum innovation needs to recognise that:

> … [a] bottom-up approach to research that starts with teachers and what they do will help to identify ecologies of practice, and consider the pivotal role of context in these studies (Burns, Freeman & Edwards, 2015, p. 596).

Second, this study adds to the volume of research output which regards reflection as playing a vital role in teacher professional growth (Calderhead & Gates, 1993; Farrell, 2008, 2016; Jiang, 2012). Given the importance of teachers' reflection and the fact that not all language teachers are aware of their beliefs or to what extent their beliefs are reflected in their classroom practices, teachers' reflection should be a focus of teachers' professional development. Teacher professional development programs should provide or incorporate opportunities for teachers to reflect and articulate their beliefs and theorize their practices. Reflection on its own can be a useful form of 'self-mediated professional development', especially such 'evidence-based' reflection as carried out in this study (Farrell & Ives, 2015, p. 595).

Third, this study suggests that effective PD should embody some key features such as being systematic, sustained and simultaneously guided by theory yet related to classroom practices and applicable to teachers. It should facilitate teachers to know about, know why and know how to carry out a practice, supporting them to achieve success and experience the differences they could make with alternative practices. Such reflection and change in practices might trigger belief change and thus lead to deep

change in teachers.

Fourth, to facilitate the uptake of learner-centred philosophy, teacher educators and PD programs need to embody the philosophy of learner-centredness, as 'we cannot teach what we do not model' (Urbanski, 1995, p. 289). Teacher development is a learning process, which would benefit from training practices that align with learner-centredness. Therefore, learner-centred features should be taken into consideration in the designing and conducting of PD programs. Such features include: cooperation, discussion, interaction, participation, positive feedback and encouragement, scaffolding, peer learning, self-evaluation, reflection, meaningfulness, relevance, interest, prior learning, and responsiveness to trainee teachers' needs.

9.4.3 Implications for school leaders and policy makers

This study reveals the complexity and high demands of the classroom which:

> draws [teachers'] focus to day-to-day effects or short-term perspectives; it isolates them from other adults, especially meaningful interaction with colleagues; it exhausts their energy; and it limits their opportunities for sustained reflection (Fullan, 2007, p. 24-25).

School leaders and policy makers should have an understanding and empathy for teachers, as

> [o] ne of the basic reasons why planning fails is that planners or decision makers of change are unaware of the situations faced by potential implementers (ibid., p. 110)

Only grounded in such a perspective would contextual constraints and hindrances, and teacher needs and challenges, be acknowledged and addressed gradually, if not radically. In this way, a facilitative and positive school culture would be established to enhance teaching and learning outcomes. Chen's case implies that teachers' professional identity, especially in the period of transition, is closely related to their identity and well-being. These are influenced by the immediate organizational arrangements and physical setting, which in turn influence how teachers perceive matters and act accordingly.

Furthermore, this study has identified various good practices in different teachers. Therefore, a 'culture of cooperation', sharing and reflection should be cultivated for teachers to share and reflect on their teaching together, to learn from each other and to support each other (Ng, 2009). In addition, for a school to move towards a more learner-centred culture, students' evaluation and feedback on teaching should be incorporated in the curriculum and the school administration system. Insights gathered from such student-related feedback should be used for the constant improvement of management and teaching, in the best interest of learners.

Teachers are 'the key to the reform' (MOE 2001, 2003; Tang, 2009). This principle first implies that teachers must be understood and heard. Only when teachers are given a voice could problems and issues be diagnosed and teachers' needs be analysed. Based on such understanding, tailor-made measures could be taken to support teachers in their professional development towards more learner-centred pedagogical beliefs. Second, it points to the importance of 'capacity building' to enhance

> the collective efficacy of a group to improve student learning through new knowledge, enhanced resources, and greater motivation on the part of people working individually and together (Fullan, 2007, p. 58).

Furthermore, to unlock fully the potential of teachers and the whole education system, a 'culture of collegiality' needs to be developed (Ng, 2009, p. 200). Teachers need to be involved in curriculum change and development processes to 'eliminate such negative psychological effects as marginalisation and powerlessness' and to ensure effective implementation of the curriculum reform (Troudi & Alwan, 2010, p. 107; Bantwini, 2010).

The findings from this study show that China's learner-centred curriculum reform is taking effect to various degrees as evident in the seven teachers. As Schweisfurth (2013) points out, the concept of learner-centred education is a relative concept and a continuum. The aims of learner-centred curriculum reform should be to gradually change the whole education system for the better and to be more responsive to learner

and teacher needs, 'building on the existing pedagogical practices', taking into consideration the local contextual reality (Schweisfurth, 2013, p. 6). Informed by this study, decisions could be made and measures could be taken to further advance this mission.

9.4.4 Methodological implications

Methodologically, this study has five distinct implications. First, studying teachers' beliefs and actual practices, as well as teachers' explanations for their actual practices, yields insightful and significant findings. Following other researchers, this study reinforces the importance of situating the teachers' beliefs and practices in social contexts and investigating them in a more interactive manner (Borg, 2006; Li, 2013; Zheng, 2013).

Second, the framework of learner-centredness, based on sound theories and practices, as well as the associated matrices, ensured that the data analysis was carried out in a systematic manner, making the large quantity of data more manageable. Third, this study lends support to the suggestion that employing 'qualitative strategies to explore language teachers' actual practices and beliefs will be more productive' (Philips & Borg, 2009). The stimulated recall interviews for teachers to rationalize their practices was valuable and effective in exploring the underlining factors that influenced teachers' beliefs and teaching. Fourth, the multiple data collection tools ensured the generation of comprehensive data sets, which, together with detailed descriptions of data collection and analysis processes, provided an in-depth understanding of the phenomena under investigation and enhanced the trustworthiness of the research studies. Fifth, compared to a single case study, this multiple case study design generated more diverse findings, enabling cross-case comparison and contrast, which triggered the exploration of the discrepancies and underlying factors. Overall, the aim of this study is to inform teaching in the interest of student learning, with findings that are meaningful, practical and accessible for classroom practitioners and researchers.

9.5 Limitations of the study

This study is a qualitative study involving only seven teachers in two secondary schools in a city in the Southwest of China. Therefore, interpreting findings should be done with reference to the contextual information provided. The data were generated through co-construction by the researcher and the participants at a specific context of time and place, and therefore it only represents the seven teachers' beliefs and practices at the moment when the data were gathered. The findings in this study could hardly represent the mass of Chinese Secondary EFL teachers due to the significant economic, social and educational differences across different regions in China.

A second limitation is that the framework of learner-centredness, although based on literature, is mediated and limited to my own understandings. This framework, therefore, needs to be further validated and adapted for use elsewhere. Like many other conceptual frameworks which provide a means to think through major influences, this framework of learner-centredness and the associated matrices enabled the investigation of the complex phenomena related to teacher beliefs, classroom practices and the relationship between the two. This framework, nevertheless, simplifies reality, which is far more complicated.

9.6 Future research

Despite the limitations associated with the research findings, this study offers a foundation for further research dialogue around topics related to learner-centred education, L2 classroom practice, L2 teacher beliefs, curriculum implementation and L2 teacher professional development. In particular, several directions for future research are envisioned.

First, research projects or professional development projects can be developed to use the framework of learner-centredness for guided teacher reflection and self-evaluation at regular intervals. The aim would be to develop shared meanings for the curriculum reform and learner-centred philosophy, thereby facilitating teacher development and

change. With such a project, a longitudinal research study could be conducted to document teacher change over a period of time, further exploring the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices and factors influencing these, thereby identifying more features that make for effective professional development programs. Participating in research studies is itself a way to advance learner-centred education and facilitate teacher change. Therefore, such research projects could involve more teachers and teacher educators.

Second, a handbook of learner-centred L2 teaching practices could be developed, drawing upon the learner-centred practices identified in this study and other research studies. The handbook could be used in teacher development programs or as a teacher reference book. Such a book with practical examples and ideally provided with a brief context of the classrooms and with an explanation and a link to theories would be valuable and beneficial to L2 teachers.

Third, the ultimate aim of educational research is to enhance students' learning outcomes. Therefore, research studies that link teachers' learner-centredness with student learning outcomes and feedback could be conducted. Such studies could aim to understand how students perceive and respond to change in teachers' practice and how the changes influence students' learning outcomes. The studies can also guide teachers' action research to maximise the potential of the research studies and to involve more teachers and schools.

9.7 Final words

This research study has provided an in-depth understanding of the seven L2 teachers and their teaching practices. It highlights the importance of studying teachers' overall beliefs and practices together and exploring their explanations about their beliefs and practices. It also highlights the importance of understanding each teacher's socio-cultural and historical contexts. This understanding needs to be linked to curriculum change and the ways in which teachers integrate such changes into their

beliefs about teaching, which are then evident (or not) in their classroom practice. As Fullan (2007) observed:

> Reform is not just putting into place the latest policy. It means changing the cultures of classrooms, schools, districts, universities, and so on … solution must come through the development of shared meaning (p. 7).

This study is a contribution in this direction as it provides insights into L2 teachers' understanding of the meaning of the learner-centred philosophy that underpins the recent curriculum reform.

This study unfolds the complexity of L2 classroom teaching, which needs to be understood from a comprehensive point of view, as teachers' practice may have inconsistencies across different dimensions of classroom teaching. Teachers need to be given voice to theorize their practices, which will provide insights into what actually matters, what concerns teachers and how they enact their teaching beliefs, rather than merely judging teachers based on students' examination results. These insights can shape the changing cultures of education in China. When it is deemed necessary to judge teachers, such judgements need to be validated through research-based frameworks, with the purpose of analysing teachers' practices, identifying any areas for further development and support, so as to tailor teacher training or PD programs to meet these needs. The ultimate goal of research studies is to take informed measures to continue to develop and support teaching so that teachers can turn their practice towards serving the best interests of learners. As captured in the poem at the beginning of the thesis: 'what is taught is not what is learnt' while 'what is learnt matters more than what is taught'.

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Appendix 1 Learner-centered psychological principles

I. COGNITIVE AND METACOGNITIVE FACTORS

Principle 1: Nature of the learning process.
The learning of complex subject matter is most effective when it is an intentional process of constructing meaning from information and experience.

Principle 2: Goals of the learning process.
The successful learner, over time and with support and instructional guidance, can create meaningful, coherent representations of knowledge.

Principle 3: Construction of knowledge.
The successful learner can link new information with existing knowledge in meaningful ways.

Principle 4: Strategic thinking
The successful learner can create and use a repertoire of thinking and reasoning strategies to achieve complex learning goals.

Principle 5: Thinking about thinking
Higher order strategies for selecting and monitoring mental operations facilitate creative and critical thinking.

Principle 6: Context of learning
Learning is influenced by environmental factors, including culture, technology, and instructional practices.

II. MOTIVATIONAL AND AFFECTIVE FACTORS

Principle 7: Motivational and emotional influences on learning
What and how much is learned is influenced by the learner's motivation. Motivation to learn, in turn, is influenced by the individual's emotional states, beliefs, interests and goals, and habits of thinking.

Principle 8: Intrinsic motivation to learn
The learner's creativity, higher order thinking, and natural curiosity all contribute to motivation to learn. Intrinsic motivation is stimulated by tasks of optimal novelty and difficulty, relevant to personal interests, and providing for personal choice and control.

Principle 9: Effects of motivation on effort
Acquisition of complex knowledge and skills requires extended learner effort and guided practice. Without learners' motivation to learn, the willingness to exert this effort is unlikely without coercion.

III. DEVELOPMENTAL AND SOCIAL FACTORS

Principle 10: Developmental influence on learning
As individuals develop, they encounter different opportunities and experience different constraints for

learning. Learning is most effective when differential development within and across physical, intellectual, emotional, and social domains is taken into account.

Principle 11: Social influences on learning

Learning is influenced by social interactions, interpersonal relations, and communication with others.

IV. INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES FACTORS

Principle 12: Individual differences in learning

Learners have different strategies, approaches, and capabilities for learning that are a function of prior experience and heredity.

Principle 13: Learning and diversity

Learning is most effective when differences in learners' linguistic, cultural, and social backgrounds are taken into account.

Principle 14: Standards and assessment

Setting appropriately high and challenging standards and assessing the learner and learning progress-including diagnostic, process, and outcome assessment-are integral parts of the learning process.

(APA Work Group of the Board of Educational Affairs, 1997)

Appendix 2 Information letter to the principal

Dear Principal,

I am a Ph.D. student from the University of South Australia, doing a research project on EFL teachers' practices and beliefs. I am writing to introduce my research project hoping to obtain your support and allow me to conduct the research in your school for about three months. The purpose of my research is to provide an in-depth understanding of the complexity of the secondary EFL teachers' teaching practices and beliefs, as well as factors contributing to their practices and beliefs. I plan to recruit eight junior secondary EFL teachers to participate in this study. The participation in this study would involve:

- A debrief meeting, when I will be introducing my research to the participating teachers and getting to know them;
- An initial interview of 1.5 hours with each participant about the his/her general teaching beliefs and practices;
- Five observations of each participant's classroom teaching (45 minutes each) (I will be a non-participant observer), and a 10-minute conversational interview with the participants before and after each observation to discuss their lesson plans and reflect on their classroom teaching;
- A 1.5-hour stimulated recall interview with each participant when the audio-recording of his/her own classroom teaching will be played and questions about it will be asked;
- The interviews will take place in your school or at another suitable location;
- All the interviews and classroom observations audio-visual recorded. I will not gather any data from any students for this study.

The participation in this study is completely voluntary and teachers may withdraw at any time. An informed consent form will be provided and signed by the teachers who are interested and wish to participate. I will try all means to minimize my disruption to your school, the participants, and classes observed. To protect the privacy and guarantee confidentiality to the participants and your school, pseudonyms will be used for the participants and your school will be referred to as 'a junior secondary school in …' in the data analysis and reporting. Besides, the data collected from the study will be kept locked and stored in the University of South Australia for up to five years. The results of my study will be published as a thesis under the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education at the University of South Australia and possibly as journal articles. I will submit a final written paper to the Graduate Research Committee of the University of South Australia and will send a summary project report to your school and the teachers who have participated in the study. Notification of any publications arising from the research will be given on request.

Your support and permission for the study to be conducted in your school will be very much appreciated! Should you have any queries about this study, please contact me at 13765341300 or by e-mail at loumy004@mymail.unisa.edu.au. Or you may contact my supervisor Professor Bruce Johnson by e-mail at brucejohnson@unisa.edu.au.

Sincerely yours,
Mingkun Lou

Information letter to the principal (Chinese version)

尊敬的_____校长,

我是来自南澳大利亚大学的一名在读博士生，我在对英语教师的教学实践和理念进行研究。 此函旨在向您介绍我的研究项目，希望您能支持和允许我在贵校进行为期约三个月的研究。本项研究的目的是深入地了解中学英语教学的复杂性以及影响教师教学实践和信念的因素。我计划招募八名初中英语教师来参加此项研究。参与此项研究涉及到以下事务：

- 一次情况汇报会议，会议上我会向参与此研究的教师介绍此研究项目并认识他们；
- 一次1.5小时的个人采访，了解每位参与者的综合的教学理念和实践；
- 观察每位参与者的5节课 （45分钟/节），（ 我仅观察而不参与课堂）， 每节课课前及课后在教师不上课的期间根据实际情况尽快进行10分钟的非正式访谈，讨论教案及反思课堂教学；
- 一次1.5小时的刺激回忆采访，采访时每位参与者将观看自己的课堂教学的录音并回答相关的问题；
- 采访可能在贵校进行，也可能在其他合适的地方进行；
- 我会对所有的采访及课堂教学进行录音；
- 我不会向任何学生收集任何数据。

参与此研究完全是自愿的，教师们可以在任何时候退出参与。感兴趣和愿意参与的教师将会签署一份知情同意书。我会尽量减小我对贵校，对参与者及我所观察的班级的妨碍。为了保护参与者和贵校的隐私和确保保密性，在数据分析和汇报中，每位参与者将会有对应的假名，贵校将会被称为’ … ...的一所初中’。此外，本次研究所收集的数据将会被存放在南澳大利亚大学5年，研究结果将会被发表为南澳大学教育方向博士论文，也可能被发表为期刊论文。我将向南澳大学研究生研究委员会递交最后的论文，也会把本次研究的报告的摘要寄给贵校及参与此次研究的教师们。若贵校要求，我会提供给贵校基于本次研究而发表的刊物的信息。

不甚感激您的支持和同意此项研究在贵校进行！您若对此研究项目有任何的质疑，请致电13765341300或通过电子邮件loumy004@mymail.unisa.edu.au 联系我，您也可以通过电子邮件brucejohnson@unisa.edu.au联系我的导师Bruce Johnson 教授。

此致

敬礼！

娄明坤

Appendix 3 Letter of invitation to teachers

Dear Teacher:

I am a Ph.D. student from the University of South Australia, doing a research project on teachers' practices and beliefs. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research. The purpose of my research is to provide an in-depth understanding of the complexity of the secondary EFL teachers' teaching practices and beliefs, as well as factors contributing to their practices and beliefs.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. I will try all means to minimize my disruption to your class. To protect your privacy and guarantee confidentiality to you, I will assign pseudonyms to you and the name of your school will not be mentioned in data analysis and reporting. The data collected from the study will be kept locked and stored in the University of South Australia for up to five years. The results of my study will be published as a thesis under the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education at the University of South Australia and possibly as journal articles. I will submit a final written paper to the Graduate Research Committee of the University of South Australia and will send a summary project report to the school and teachers who participated in the study. Notification of any publications arising from the research will be given to you on request.

The participation in this study would involve:

- A debrief meeting, when I will be introducing my research to the participating teachers and getting to know them;
- One 1.5-hour interview about your general beliefs and practices;
- Five observations of your classroom teaching (45 minutes each) (I will be a non-participant observer), and a 10-minute conversational interview with the participants before and after each observation to discuss their lesson plans and reflect on their classroom teaching;
- One 1.5-hour stimulated recall interview when the audio-recording of your own classroom teaching will be played and questions about it will be asked;
- The interviews will take place in your school or at another suitable location;
- All the interviews and classroom observation will be audio-recorded;
- I will not gather any data from your students for this study。

If you (or another teacher) are interested in participating in this study, please complete the attached Informed Consent Form and return it to your principal _____by July 20th. If you have any queries about this study, please contact me at 13765341300 or by e-mail at loumy004@mymail.unisa.edu.au, or you may contact my supervisor Professor Bruce Johnson at by e-mail at brucejohnson@unisa.edu.au.

Sincerely yours,

Mingkun Lou

Letter of invitation to teachers (Chinese version)

亲爱的老师,

我是来自南澳大利亚大学的一名在读博士生，我在对英语教师的教学实践和理念进行研究。 此函旨在邀请您参加我的研究项目。本项研究的目的是深入地了解中学英语教学的复杂性以及影响教师教学实践和信念的因素。

参与此研究项目完全是自愿的，您可以在任何时候退出参与。我会尽量减小我对您的班级的妨碍，为了保护您和贵校的隐私和确保保密性，在数据分析和汇报中，您将会有对应的假名，贵校的名字将不会被提及。此外，本次研究所收集的数据将会被存放在南澳大利亚大学5年，研究结果将会被发表为南澳大学教育方向博士论文，也可能被发表为期刊论文。 我将向南澳大学研究生研究委员会递交最后的论文，也会把本次研究的报告的摘要寄给贵校及参与此次研究的教师们。您若要求，我会向您提供基于本次研究而发表的刊物的信息。

参与此项研究涉及到以下事务：

- 一次情况汇报会议，会议上我会向参与此研究的教师们介绍此研究项目并认识大家；
- 一次1.5小时的个人采访，了解您的综合的教学理念和实践；
- 观察您的5节课 （45分钟/节），（我仅观察而不参与课堂）， 每节课课前及课后在您不上课的期间根据实际情况尽快进行10分钟的非正式访谈，讨论教案及反思课堂教学；
- 一次1.5小时的刺激回忆采访，采访时每位参与者将听自己的课堂教学的录音并回答相关的问题；
- 采访可能在贵校进行，也可能在其他合适的地方进行；
- 我会对所有的采访及课堂教学进行录音；
- 我不会向任何学生收集任何数据。

您（或者其他教师）若有兴趣参加此研究，请签署后面附上的知情同意书并于7月20日之前叫到_____校长处。您若对此研究项目有任何的质疑，请致电13765341300或通过电子邮件loumy004@mymail.unisa.edu.au 联系我，您也可以通过电子邮件 brucejohnson@unisa.edu.au联系我的导师Bruce Johnson 教授。

此致!

娄明坤

Appendix 4 Principal's letter of permission

I hereby approve Mingkun Lou, PhD student from the University of South Australia, to conduct a research project on Chinese secondary EFL teachers' teaching practices and beliefs as well as development in our school.

This approval is granted under the conditions:

This project is approved by the University of South Australia's Human Research Ethics Committee and the researcher abides by the *Australian National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* as well as China's *Higher Education Human and Social Science Academic Conduct Guide*. Any ethical concerns about the project or questions about the participants' right can be direct to the Executive Officer of *University of South Australia's Human Research Ethics Committee*, Tel: +61 8 8302 3118; Email: Vicki.Allen@unisa.edu.au

The participating teachers are free to withdraw their consent and discontinue their participation at any time without negative consequences. If they decide to withdraw their consent, they can do this by notifying the researcher (Mingkun Lou) by contacting her by telephone at 13765341300 or by e-mail at loumy004@mymail.unisa.edu.au. Or they may contact Mingkun Lou's supervisor by e-mail at brucejohnson@unisa.edu.au.

The participation in this study is CONFIDENTIAL and that pseudonyms will be used so there is no way to identify the teachers who are participating in this study.

Special care will be taken to protect the data derived from this study, and the data will be kept locked and stored in the University of South Australia for up to five years, after which, the data will be discarded by the University of South Australia.

After the research is finished, our school and the participants will receive a summary report of the project. Notification of any publications arising from the research will be provided on request.

School Name:

School Address:

Telephone:

Email:

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Principal's letter of permission (Chinese version)

兹申明我校批准来自澳大利亚南澳大学的博士生娄明坤在我校开展对英语教师的教学实践、理念及发展的研究项目。

本批文的批准条件如下：

一、此研究项目必须经过南澳大学人文研究伦理委员会审批，研究者遵守澳大利亚《人文研究道德规范国家声明》及中国《高校人文社会科学学术规范指南》。若有有关道德规范及参与者的权利的问题或顾虑，可以通过电话+61 8 8302 3118或电子邮件 Vicki.Allen@unisa.edu.au联系澳大利亚人文研究伦理委员会南澳大学执行官。

二、参与研究的教师们可以在任何时候撤回同意，不再继续参与此研究，并且不会有任何负面的后果。如果他们决定撤回同意，他们可以致电13765341300或通过电子邮件loumy004@mymail.unisa.edu.au 通知娄明坤，也可以通过电子邮件brucejohnson@unisa.edu.au联系娄明坤的导师Bruce Johnson 教授。

三、参与此研究项目是保密的，假名字会被使用从而确保参与的教师及我校不会被辨认出来。

四、研究者将谨慎保护此次研究所收集的数据，研究结束后数据将会被存放在南澳大学5年，之后由南澳大学销毁。

五、研究结束后，我校及参与研究的教师将收到本次研究的报告的摘要，也可以要求收到基于本次研究所发表的刊物的相关信息。

学校名称：

地址：

电话：

电子邮件：

签名:_____

日期:_____

Appendix 5 Teachers' consent form to participate

This is to state that I am informed and agree to participate in this research being conducted by Mingkun Lou (Doctoral Student of the University of South Australia).

A. PURPOSE

I have been informed that the purpose of the research is to provide an in-depth understanding of the complexity of the secondary EFL teachers' teaching practices and beliefs, as well as factors contributing to their practices and beliefs.

B. PROCEDURES

I have been informed that participation in this study would involve:

- A debrief meeting, when the researcher will be introducing her research to the participating teachers and getting to know us;
- One 1.5-hour interview about my general beliefs and practices;
- Five observations of my classroom teaching (45 minutes each) (the researcher will be a non-participant observer), and a 10-minute conversational interview with the me before and after each observation to discuss my lesson plans and reflect on my classroom teaching;
- One 1.5-hour stimulated recall interview when the audio-recording of my own classroom teaching will be played and questions about it will be asked;
- The interviews will take place in my school or at another suitable location;
- All the interviews and classroom observation will be audio recorded.
- The researcher will not gather any data from your students for this study;
- After the report is finished, I will receive a summary report of the project.
- I can request to receive notification of any publications arising from the research.

C. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time without negative consequences. If I decide to withdraw my consent, I can do this by notifying the researcher (Mingkun Lou) by contacting her by telephone at 13765341300 or by e-mail at loumy004@mymail.unisa.edu.au. Or I may contact Mingkun Lou's supervisor by e-mail at brucejohnson@unisa.edu.au.

I understand that my participation in this study is CONFIDENTIAL and that pseudonyms will be used so there is no way to identify the teachers who are participating in this study. My school's identity will be concealed and referred to as 'a school in …'

I understand that the data from this study will be kept locked and stored in the University of South Australia for up to five years. I am also advised that the results of the study will be published in a doctoral thesis, and possibly as journal articles.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Teachers' consent form to participate (Chinese version)

兹申明我知情并同意参与娄明坤（南澳大利亚大学博士生）进行的研究项目。

一、研究目的

我已被告知本项研究的目的是深入地了解中学英语的复杂性以及影响教师教学实践和信念的因素。

二、研究过程

我已被告知本项研究参与此项研究涉及到以下事务：

- 一次情况汇报会议，会议上研究者会向参与此研究的教师介绍此研究项目并认识我们；
- 一次1.5小时的个人采访，我的综合的教学理念和实践；
- 观察我的5节课 （45分钟/节），（ 研究者仅观察而不参与课堂），每节课课前及课后在我不上课的期间根据实际情况尽快进行10分钟的非正式访谈，讨论教案及反思课堂教学；
- 一次1.5小时的刺激回忆采访，采访时我将听自己的课堂教学的录音并回答相关的问题；
- 采访可能在我校进行，也可能在其他合适的地方进行；
- 研究者会对所有的采访及课堂教学进行录音；
- 研究者不会向任何学生收集任何数据。
- 研究结束后，我将收到研究报告的摘要。

三. 参与条件

我明白我可以在任何时候撤回我的同意，不再继续参与此研究，并且不会有任何负面的后果。如果我决定撤回我的同意，我可以请致电13765341300或通过电子邮件 loumy004@mymail.unisa.edu.au 通知娄明坤，也可以通过电子邮件 brucejohnson@unisa.edu.au联系娄明坤的导师Bruce Johnson 教授。

我明白参与此研究项目是保密的，假名字会被使用从而确保参与此研究的教师不会被辨认出来，我的学校的身份会被隐匿掉并被称为'… ...的一所学校'。

我明白此研究所收集的数据将会被存放在南澳大利亚大学5年，研究结果将会被发表为博士论文，也可能被发表为期刊论文。

签名: _____

日期: _____

Appendix 6 Interview Protocol 1

Date_____ **Interviewee_____**

Basic information of teachers

Age_____ Years of teaching_____ Degree_____ Major_____

Focus 1: Lesson plan (discuss the plan for the whole term and for the focused week).

1. When you plan the lesson, what concerns you most? (students' needs, prior learning, interest, learning style, covering contents, teach for the exams, overall development of students, students learning skills and strategies, grammar, listening, speaking, reading, writing ability…?

Focus 2: Textbook and resources

2. What do you think of the textbook and what is the role of the textbook?
3. What other resources or materials do you use besides the textbook?

Focus 3: Assessment

4. What exams do students have to sit and what do you think of the exams? (school level, city level ...）
5. Do you think your most important job is to help students pass the exams with good grades?
6. How do you monitor and assess students' progress? Why? (purposes, self-assessment, peer assessment ...）

Focus 4: Environment/atmosphere/interpersonal relationship

7. What is the classroom atmosphere in your class like?
8. What are your relationship with the students and the relationship between students like? (caring, trust, respectful, encouraging, competitive, cooperative, relaxing, stress-free ...）
9. If you feel very bad one day, would you show your true self to the students and share with them your feelings, or would you not let students know about it? Why?
10. Would you prefer to share who you are as a person with your students or to be an authority figure.
11. What would you do and how would you feel if you make a mistake in front of the students?
12. Do you try your best to get to know students personally? (backgrounds, interests, motivation, learning styles, aspiration ...）
13. Do you encourage students to express their personal beliefs and feelings? Why?
14. Do you address students' social, emotional, and physical needs? How?

Focus 5: Responsibilities/power relationship

15. Who set the classroom rules for management and discipline?
16. Who decorates the classroom?
17. Do you give students some choices in decision-making? In what way? (management, class rules, contents, tasks, homework, assessment ...)

Focus 6: How students develop and learn

18. Do you think students are similar and learn in similar ways?
19. If students are not motivated to learning English, what would you do?
20. Do you treat students in the same way with the same standard?
21. Do you agree that innate ability is fairly fixed and some children just can't learn as well as others?
22. Are there any students who are just not smart enough, even with feedback or hints, they just can't figure out their mistakes?
23. Are there any students who are so hard to deal with as to let you feel upset and inadequate?
24. Do you think some students are unreachable no matter what you do or how hard you try?
25. What would you do if some students just refused to learn?
26. Do you think it is too late to help some students to learn English?
27. What would you do if some students consistently caused problems in class?
28. What would you do with students who are slow in understanding or not progressing well?
29. Do you think students can get the right answers or make progress without your direct teaching and telling them the answers?

Focus 7: Goals of English Education

30. What do you think are the goals of English teaching?
    - to get good grades in exams
    - to speak fluent English
    - to be able to pronounce accurately
    - to learn about grammar rules and use grammar correctly
    - to be able to communicate with others
    - to accumulate vocabulary
    - to develop interests and a positive attitude towards English and English language learning
    - to develop cultural awareness and broaden outlook
    - to develop learning skill and strategies
    - to develop overall English abilities
    - to develop language awareness and learning ability
    - to develop students self-confidence in learning and communicating in English
    - to learn to cooperate and interact with others, respect others' ideas and share opinions with others

Focus 8: About the 2001/2012 curriculum reform

31. What do you know about the 2001/2012 curriculum standards?
32. Have you ever read them?
33. Have you ever received any training about them?
34. What's your understanding of learner-centredness (advocated in the curriculum standards)?

Adapted from teacher beliefs survey, teacher classroom practice survey developed by Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory (McCombs & Whisler 1997)

Interview Protocol 1 (Chinese version)

采访草案 1　　日期_____　　被采访者_____

教师基本信息

年龄_____　　教龄_____　　学位_____　　专业_____

关注点 1： 教案 （讨论整个学期及当周的教案）

1. 备课时你最关注的是什么？（学生的需求，以前学过的内容，兴趣，学习风格，覆盖教学内容，考试，学生的综合发展，学习技巧和策略，语法，听，说，读，写的能力…...？）

关注点 2：教材与教学内容

2. 你觉得教科书怎么样？你觉得教科书在教学中起到什么样的作用？
3. 除了教科书，你还使用哪些教学资源和材料来辅助教学？

关注点 3：考评

4. 学生必须参加哪些考试，你怎样看待这些考试的？（校级考试，市级考试… …）
5. 你觉得你最重要的工作是帮助学生在考试中取得好的成绩吗？
6. 你怎样监控和评价学生的进步的？为什么？（评价目的，自我评价，同辈评价… …）

关注点 4：教学环境、氛围、人际关系

7. 你教的班级的氛围怎样？
8. 你和学生之间，学生与学生之间的关系怎样（关爱，信任，尊重，鼓励，竞争，合作，轻松，没有压力… ...）
9. 假如某一天你心情很糟糕，你会在学生面前表现出真实的自己，让学生知道你的感受，还是不让学生知道？为什么？
10. 你愿意作为真实的自己还是愿意作为一个权威人物出现在学生面前？
11. 如果你在学生面前犯了错误，你会怎么办？
12. 你有没有设法去了解你的学生？ （家庭/学习背景，兴趣，学习动机，学习风格，理想抱负… …）
13. 你鼓励学生表达出他们个人的观点和感受吗？
14. 你关注学生的社会、情感和生理需求吗？怎样做的呢？

关注点 5：责任、权力关系

15. 班级纪律和管理规则是谁制定的？
16. 教室是谁装饰的?
17. 在做决定方面，你会给学生一些选择权吗？哪些方面？（班级管理规定，教学内容，教学活动/任务，作业，评估方式… …）

关注点 6：学生怎样学习和发展

18. 你觉得学生们都相似，都用相似的方式学习吗？
19. 假如学生没有学习动机，你会怎么做?
20. 你用同样的方式和标准对待学生们吗？
21. 你有没有觉得先天的能力是难以改变的，有些学生就是不能学得和其他孩子一样好？
22. 有没有遇到过一些不够聪明孩子，哪怕你给出反馈和提示，他们就是弄不明白自己错在哪儿？
23. 有没有遇到过一些很难对付的孩子，使你觉得心烦不安和自己能力不够？

24. 有没有觉得无论你做什么或怎样努力，有些孩子就是无法接近？
25. 假如有学生拒绝学习，你会怎么办？
26. 你有没有觉得要帮助有些孩子学习英语已经太迟了？
27. 假如有学生不断在课上捣乱，你会怎么办？
28. 假如有学生理解能力慢或进步慢，你会怎么办？
29. 你有没有觉得不通过直接的教学和告知答案，学生不能找到正确答案，也难以取得进步？

关注点 7：英语教学的目的

30. 你觉得英语教学的目的是什么？
    - 能在考试中取得好成绩
    - 能准确地发音
    - 学习语法规则，正确使用语法
    - 能与别人用英语交流
    - 积累词汇量
    - 培养对英语和学习英语的兴趣和积极的态度
    - 培养文化意识，开拓视野
    - 培养学习技巧和策略
    - 培养英语综合能力
    - 培养语言意识和学习能力
    - 培养学生学习英语和用英语交流的自信心
    - 学会与他人合作和互动，尊重他人的想法，与他人分享自己的观点

关注点 8：关于 2001/2012 课程标准

31. 关于 2001/2012 课程标准你了解哪些信息?
32. 你读过 2001/2012 课程标准吗?
33. 你接受过关于 2001/2012 课程标准的培训吗?
34. 你怎么理解（新课程标准中提倡的）以学生为中心的理念?

Appendix 7 Observation protocol

Observation Protocol			
Time:_____	**Class:_____**	**Teacher_____**	**Number of students: ____girls, ____boys**
Environment (decoration, posters.)		Seat arrangement (how and why)	_____line _____row

Teaching procedure

Time	**Activity**	**What T does**	**What Sts do**	**Interaction pattern**	**Other observation and comments**

Classroom atmosphere	competitive —cooperative relaxing— stressful safe enjoyable sharing caring
Power relationship	T dominated democratic negotiation shared decision-making

Appendix 8 Interview protocol 2

Informal conversational interview before and after each observation

Date_____ **Class _____** **Interviewee_____**	**Reasons:** (beliefs, assumption, knowledge…)	**From where?** (schooling, pre-service, in-service, school norm, culture…)	**Contextual factors** (government, local school policy, requirement)	**Other comments**
Before observation: questions about the lesson plans:				
1. What to teach? Why?				
2. What are the objectives? why?				
3. Any special focus? Why?				
4. What are the teaching steps? Why?				
5. What activities in each step? why?				
6. What are Sts and T supposed to be doing?				
Questions after the observation				
1. How do you feel about the overall class? Satisfied/ as expected?				
2. What do you like most about this class? Why?				
3. During classroom teaching, what did you care about most? **(**covering all the contents required/ students understanding, students interaction, interests? Discipline, smooth flow of the class?)				
4. What would you change if you could? Why?				
5. Discuss incident 1 or critical moment 1				
…				