

**CURRICULUM INNOVATION AND
LISTENING COMPREHENSION WITHIN THE
NATIONAL ENGLISH TEACHING REFORM IN CHINA**

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ABSTRACT

The 'National English Teaching Reform' at university level, also known as the Reform of College English, was initiated in China in 2003. The new mode of English teaching was a combination of classroom teaching and student self-access learning via CWISs (Campus-Wide Information System). The emphasis of the Reform was on developing the students' all-round ability, especially the ability of listening and speaking. The purpose of this study was to research the implementation of this curriculum innovation in a specific university. The research applied both quantitative and qualitative methods, namely, questionnaires, interviews, listening comprehension classroom observations, and document review. According to the data collected, multi-media facilities were more widely used than before but individual self-access facilities were insufficient for every student to get access when needed. At the same time, full advantage of the facilities was not being taken of. With regard to English Listening Comprehension, students spent more time in practising, but rather than being motivated by a wish to improve their all-round ability, many of them regarded it as necessary primarily for the purpose of passing the nationwide College English Test (CET), a qualification highly regarded by employers. A general finding was that autonomous study had not yet been realised in the university. Various reasons for this are explored, among them the fact that teachers did not provide a bridge between classroom instruction and self-access learning. Teachers' own difficulties in coping with the technology are also considered. Four series of English Listening Comprehension textbooks were designed for the Reform and were recommended by the Ministry of Education. However, the researched University used another textbook package because it was evaluated to be more suitable for students.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The National English Teaching Reform in China was initiated in 2003 for the purpose of enhancing university students' all-round ability, especially in listening and speaking. In effect, this reform represented a recognition of changed economic needs and an attempt to reshape English teaching within universities to satisfy these needs.

This chapter establishes the background to the Reform and the thesis as a whole. It first introduces the status of English teaching and learning within China's education system. Secondly, there is brief discussion of the Chinese College English curriculum and curriculum innovation in relation to this. Thirdly, the focus of the research and its significance are stated, and finally, the structure of the entire thesis is presented.

1.1.1 English in China

In China, English is not an official second language; it is not even a publicly used language. However, teaching and learning English does enable people to be connected with the whole world. Henry and Pritchard (1999) acknowledge that for Chinese, there has been a strong link between the ability to use English, and 'their ability to develop economically and create closer contacts with the outside world' (p.47). English offers access to information. It is used to communicate for the purpose of doing business or establishing political relationships. It also enables students to be admitted to higher education overseas.

However, 40 years ago, English was not regarded as important. Dai (2003) recalls that not much importance was attached to English before the 1970s, and only from the late 1970s and early 1980s did English start to be accepted as the major foreign language in most parts of China. One factor in this was the increased weight attached to English in the College Entrance Examinations between 1977 and 1983. In 1977, English scores counted for only 10% in the Entrance Examination, which meant that if a student got 90

points as his / her English score, only 9 points would be calculated in the total score along with other subjects such as Chinese (counted for 100%) and Maths (counted for 100%). Gradually the proportion rose to 100% in 1983 (Data from the Summary of National English Teaching Reform meeting, the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China - MOE, 2003). This change reflected the Government's recognition that English is important; it also had an effect on students' instrumental motivation to learn English.

Kennedy (1999a) argues that English Language Teaching (ELT) 'is not isolated from the social, economic and political developments. ELT is part of them and influenced by them' (p.2). Social, economic and political forces have been important factors in the massive expansion of English teaching in China, as elsewhere. The level of all-round English proficiency required for some careers, such as English teaching and high level interpreting, is high. For other areas, though, such as customer service roles in restaurants or airports, it is oral English communication ability that matters the most. Cortazzi (1996) claims that to have significant numbers of competent users of English in a whole range of professions, businesses, workplaces and enterprises has been seen by the Chinese authorities as a key element in China's broader connection with the outside world. From this perspective, English competence depends, at least partially, on economic demands. With the opening up of China to the outside world, there has been increasing demand to communicate and do business with foreign countries. Fu, Pang and Zhou (2001) investigated the need for English in Z province, one of the developed provinces in China. In their investigation, most employers and experts drew the conclusion that the weakest aspects of employee proficiency were listening and speaking, suggesting that the skills had not been sufficiently emphasised in China's language education.

If we see course design in university as being even partly related to the needs of society, it is worthwhile looking at university language teaching and the language curriculum.

1.1.2 Teaching and learning English

Some of the problems in English language learning in Chinese universities have their

roots in earlier levels of the education system.

One of these problems is a lack of continuity in the early years of English learning. In China, most children go to a kindergarten, where they may be taught English using songs, games, pictures and toys until they are 6 or 7. At primary school, however, not all pupils start learning English from grade 1. Although some schools start to teach English from grade 1, most pupils in urban areas start to learn English from grade 3. In some remote areas, English is not taught in primary schools due to lack of teachers or funds. However, some private boarding schools employ native English speakers to speak simple English and pupils in these schools are immersed in English from grade 1.

Figure 1.1, below, presents a general framework of the educational system in China. Considering the vast land and the fact that students / teachers come from hugely different social backgrounds, as indicated above the framework differs to some extent over the country as a whole.

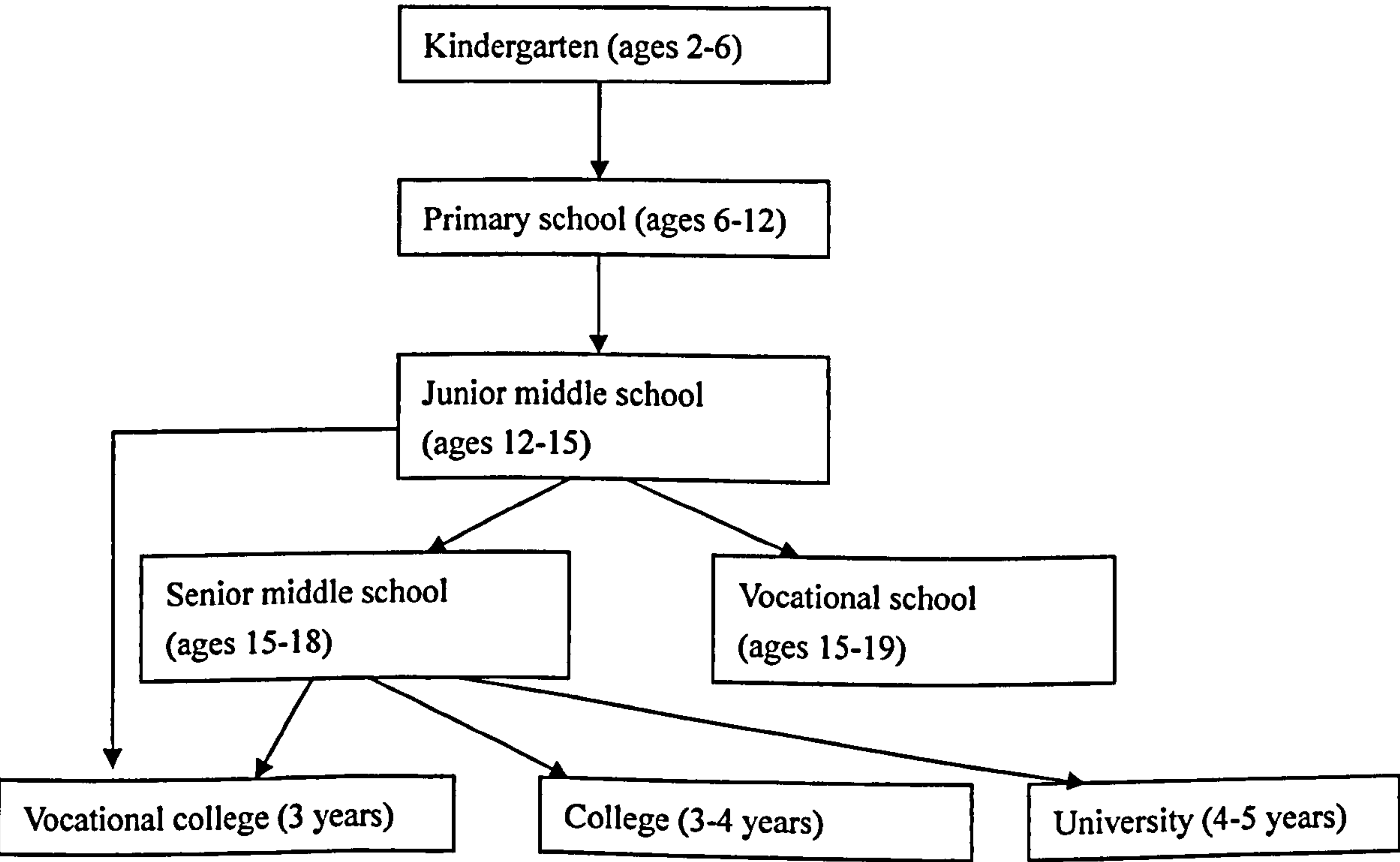


Figure 1.1: Basic educational system in China

The formal, systematic teaching of English begins from junior middle school.

Students learn basic vocabulary and grammar at this stage. Teachers not only make decisions on what students should learn, they also give full instructions on what students should do after class. That is to say, the second problem is that students learn to be dependant on their teachers. A third problem can be seen when they proceed to senior middle school. At this stage, their English study focuses on preparation for the University Entrance Examination, which mainly requires ability in reading and writing. Su (2004) argues that teachers and students treat English scores as just another requirement for university entry rather than seeing it as a language to be used for communication. Thus, teaching and learning English focuses on how to pass examinations and achieve high scores. That is why students have exams every day when they start Senior Three, which is the final year of middle school, and as a consequence have to burn the midnight oil. Classroom teaching is, in short, 'test-orientated' (see e.g., Zou, 2005; and Cai, 2007). This test-orientated teaching and learning model has its own place in history, but in the sense of keeping pace with social development and world change, it has already lagged behind (Zou, 2005; and Cai, 2007).

At university level, every student must study a foreign language for at least two years. In most parts of China, English is the compulsory (or default) language. There are two systems, one for the majority of students who are non-English majors, the other for English majors, and the Ministry of Education has set up two committees which deal exclusively with these two systems. Students' English proficiency is assessed by a national College English Test (CET) which places students in six progressive bands / levels. CET 4 (College English Test Band 4) started in 1987, and was based on the College English Curriculum of 1985. CET 6 (College English Test Band 6) commenced in 1989. In 1987, 100,000 took CET 4 (Feng, 1995a). By 2004, the figure for both exams had risen to 11,000,000. The CET certificate has been treated as a 'golden pass' in students' academic life and their job-hunting (Liu and Dai, 2004:7). This overgeneralisation of the significance of CET (MOE, 2003) may be seen as a fourth problem of the system.

During their university level study, some students continue to work hard on English learning, but others are more relaxed (Zuo, 2005; and Chen & Chen, 2007). They feel

under much less or even no pressure at all compared with their time in senior middle school. There is not so much homework and there are fewer exams. The students must balance their study of their major subjects and of English; moreover, teachers do not give instructions, as teachers in middle school, on what to do after class. Therefore students must get used to learning independently. Many researchers have studied university English learners and their English learning (see e.g. Feng, 1995b, 1998; Wen, 1995; Lan and Zeng, 2004; and Qin and Wang, 2007). Some of this research focuses on English learners' motivation (Yin, 2004; Lei, 2005; Hao, 2006; and Wang, 2007).

1.1.3 The need for a radical reform of College English

In spite of the fact that learners are encouraged, or even pushed, to improve their all-round English proficiency, and particularly their competence in listening and speaking, the established teaching and learning model still affects the introduction of any new strategy of learning. In relation to the teaching of listening, more than ten years ago, Courchene (1994) argued that few teachers used a framework of pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening activities. Almost ten years later, to judge by a description in Ren (2003), this was still not the case. Students walked into the classroom, sat down, put on the headphones (or just sat in classrooms without any audio or video facilities), and opened the textbook. Teachers introduced the new words and expressions. Students listened to the listening material (using tape recorders or audio facilities), and did the exercises. Teachers evaluated the exercises. Students listened again and teachers explained sentence by sentence. Students listened for the third time. The same procedure was followed for the next passage. The class ended. To judge from this description, teaching still focused on the text only without any incentive for interaction or any encouragement of autonomous learning. Students did the exercises passively and there was no opportunity for them to put the language they had heard to practical use.

Su (2004) argues that the distance between *the invested* and *the gained* is too great. After three years in primary school, six years in middle school and two years in college / university, with an average of five class hours for eighteen weeks each term, every student

has spent about 2000 class hours learning English. In recent years, moreover, more facilities have been provided under the most recent reforms to enhance students' ability. For example, computers and the Internet are not only making possible new strategies of teaching and learning, but also allow the latest real life English to become learning materials. However it is still questionable whether 50%, or even less, of students are able to communicate in English or read English articles (p.4). Su (2004) ascribes the failure to six reasons:

1. There has been insufficient research into the most appropriate English teaching and learning strategies in Chinese circumstances.
2. There has been a lack of competent teachers; hence, the quality of teaching cannot be guaranteed.
3. English teaching and learning is test-orientated.
4. English teaching and learning models have been unchanged for so many years without any innovation.
5. Learners are not learning actively.
6. There exist gaps between English teaching and learning in primary school, middle school and university.

(Su, 2004: 4-9, original in Chinese)

These six reasons can be understood and explained as follows:

1. Xia (2002) argues that many College English teachers do little or no research on education or English learning. Hence, teachers' insufficient theoretical understanding might have caused the slow development of teaching and learning strategies. Her statement does not highlight the real problems: teachers are either unaware of learners' difficulties or not exploring and evaluating possible teaching alternatives.

2. Hu (2002) suggests that the key to enhance the level of English teaching is to improve the teachers' proficiency level, but his recommendation is not easy to put into effect immediately because many teachers were themselves originally educated in the traditional style, which means that their own oral proficiency may be inadequate. In addition, their knowledge of the culture of the English speaking world might also be limited due to their limited real-life experience in native English environments. The summary of the National English Teaching Reform Meeting (MOE, 2003) concludes that the serious problem of the lack of teachers has not yet been solved. The ratio of English

teachers to students in Chinese universities in 2001 was 1:130. More seriously, many university teachers are not equipped for the task. Around the country, 73% of university English teachers have no higher degree than BA. Furthermore, opportunities are very rare for teachers to get in-service training, let alone the chance to go to English-speaking countries to improve their proficiency and relevant knowledge (MOE, 2003).

3. As regards the approach to teach and learn English, this has been criticised by researchers as 'test-orientated' (see e.g., Zou, 2005; and Cai, 2007). Wang & Wang (2003) investigated students in Xi'an University of Finance and Economics and found that most students admitted to test-orientated learning. 59% of the students surveyed thought the main purpose of their College English learning was to pass the test. At the same time, however, 64% thought universities and society unduly emphasise the CET examinations but ignore the development of listening and speaking skills. Researchers such as You (2005), Gong (2006), and Pan (2006) offer some reasons for teaching without practising listening and speaking: poor level of students' English proficiency, weak language ability of the teachers, limited classroom time, the large number of students, and the pressure from tests.

4. Besides the test-orientated emphasis, teaching and learning models have been unchanged for a long period. Su (2004) expressed his surprise when he randomly investigated 40 English teachers aged around 30 who were then taking a Master's training course, because 70% of the teachers 'admitted they employed grammar-translation teaching strategy' (p.6). Su (2004) describes their teaching as typically teacher-centred: the teachers talked throughout class hours, the students listened carefully and wrote down notes very carefully, the more notes the better.

5. Su's fifth point is that learners are not active. Teaching and learning models are, actually, influenced not only by teachers but also the social background, and even the available facilities. As far as learners are concerned, inefficient learning outcomes might be due to their inactive attitudes, vague learning aims, and inappropriate learning strategies. In relation to university students' lack of autonomy, Su (2004) suggests that learners are not motivated or enthusiastic to learn and they do not learn properly. Besides, some learners have already formed the habit of learning what teachers teach and doing

only what teachers require, and are therefore not making self-directed use of new technology and available English materials. Furthermore, the classroom teaching contents might be dull and students are given no guidance on how to be autonomous at university. Xia (2002), who carried out a questionnaire study of in-service College English teachers from 600 universities and colleges across China, reports that 90% of the teachers involved regarded their role as to explain the language.

6. Moreover, as indicated earlier, there exist gaps between English teaching and learning in primary school, middle school and university. The curriculum designers at university level, as stated by Dai and Wang (2006), focus on their research in universities and offices without paying much attention to the nature of middle school English education and the requirements of society. At the same time, teachers in middle school focus on tests and examinations without awareness of language teaching theories or strategies. That is to say, the curriculum for primary / secondary schools should deliberately provide for continuity. With this in mind, the school education curriculum was redesigned in 2005 to provide a better link to university level study. There also exist gaps between students. As noted earlier, many pupils in cities start learning English from grade three in primary school, whilst those in remote areas do not begin until they go to junior middle school; yet, they have to follow the same curriculum when they proceed to middle school or university. All these factors influence their starting points at universities.

To sum up, as acknowledged at the 'National English Teaching Reform Meeting' in 2003, China is a vast territory, therefore development is extremely unbalanced; there is no English immersion at all, or an environment which encourages the use of English as a second language; outside the classroom teaching resources are limited and the available teachers are far from adequate in either quality or quantity to meet the demands of the society. Very few teachers are allowed chances to enhance their language skills and understanding of culture by studying overseas. These conclusions paved the way for a radical reform of College English.

1.2 The National Reform of College English Teaching

1.2.1 The nature of the Reform

At the end of 2002, Chinese educators made the decision to undertake a thorough revision of the English curriculum as a framework for teaching and learning. The result was the ‘National English Teaching Reform’. As a first step, the Ministry of Education set up a curriculum revision working group and issued a number of guidelines. The guidelines state:

- Guideline 1: While laying a good foundation for students, teachers should go all out to develop the students’ general ability to use English;
- Guideline 2: The curriculum should be flexible and open: we need to set different requirements for different universities;
- Guideline 3: We should ensure a smooth transition from the middle school, avoiding repetition;
- Guideline 4: Colleges and universities are expected to make full use of the web and multi-media technology;
- Guideline 5: We must promote individualised teaching and autonomous learning.

(Liu and Dai, 2004: 4)

According to these guidelines, the emphasis of the Reform would be on developing the students’ all-round ability so that they could put English to practical use. The Reform abandoned the previous ‘reading only’ teaching-learning model, but it did not seek to encourage a ‘listening-and-speaking only’ model; otherwise, there would be ‘blind English’, which means one can only listen-and-speak without reading-and-writing. The new model of English teaching in the universities was a combination of classroom teaching and student self-access learning via CWISs (Campus-Wide Information Systems, a form of the intranet). Given the lack of an environment in which learners were naturally

exposed to the foreign language outside the classroom, it recognised the need to offer supportive learning and practice materials in various forms. The revised learning materials would be available not only in print form, but also in multi-dimensional forms such as DVD, software and the Internet. All these resources were introduced to stimulate learners' autonomous learning and retain their interest in learning. Furthermore, the CET examinations were also revised to ensure a better relationship between teaching and testing. A more detailed introduction to the Reform can be found in Chapter 3.

1.2.2 The process of the Reform

To judge from the documentary evidence available (see e.g. MOE, 2003; Xia, 2005; and Jia, 2006), the Reform progressed in a series of logical stages:

- 1) At the end of 2002, a project team for the 'National English Teaching Reform' was formed.
- 2) In October 2003, the 'College English Curriculum Requirements (for trial implementation)' were presented at the 'National English Teaching Reform Forum'. These gave advice and suggestions on teaching aims, teaching modes and the process of the Reform.
- 3) Four textbook packages based on the new curriculum were produced in early 2004 and universities were free to choose which to use; all of these were innovative in making use of multi-media facilities, the Internet and the intranet;
- 4) The final version of the 'College English Curriculum Requirements' was published in 2004 replacing the 1999 'College English Curriculum'.
- 5) In March 2004, teachers recommended by universities which had been selected to trial the new Requirements received special training. They were introduced to the new teaching mode, and the use of multi-media facilities, the Internet and the intranet.
- 6) 180 universities all over the country started to implement the Reform on a trial basis from 2004 using the new textbook packages.
- 7) One year later, the trial stage was completed and detailed implementation reports (see Zhuang, 2005) were submitted by those universities involved. These reports

subsequently served as a reference for other universities.

- 8) Revised versions of the College English Test (CET) became available (CET 4, 2005; and CET 6, 2006).
- 9) There is no generally available record showing exactly when other universities started to implement the Reform; however, it seems likely that this coincided with the introduction of the new version of CET 4 (i.e. in the academic year 2005-2006).

1.2.3 Major features of the Reform

The nature of teaching and learning English in China, as well as issues in teaching-learning at tertiary level, have been discussed. The primary emphasis of the Reform, as mentioned previously, is on developing students' all-round ability, i.e. to be able to comprehend the spoken as well as the written language, and to speak as well as write. This has led, therefore, to greater importance being attached to the teaching and learning of listening than was previously the case. This re-valuing of listening is reflected in the design of the textbook packages and the increased weighting given to listening within the revised CET; it is also manifested in the provision of electronic resources for student use and the new emphasis on learner autonomy. This section offers a brief introduction to each of these major features of the Reform; more detailed discussion can be found in Chapter 3.

English Listening Comprehension Curriculum

English Listening Comprehension is an integral part of English learning and learners' competence in English listening comprehension has been expected to develop as a result of the Reform. The 1999 English Curriculum emphasised English reading ability and also referred to communicative ability; yet, it still implied a teacher-centred strategy (National English Teaching Curriculum, 1999). The 2004 Requirements of the Reform suggest a learner-centred strategy and emphasise learner's all-round ability, especially the ability of

listening and speaking, and acknowledge the fact that learners in different parts of the country may have very different social and educational background by encouraging universities to adjust the teaching requirements accordingly. Further discussion on the Requirements can be found in 3.1.2.

Learner Autonomy

In China, learners have long been treated as passive receivers, and their capacity to learn independently has been ignored (Su, 2004). Autonomous learning does not come easily to Chinese university students because they have not been used to independently setting their own goals, instead, they are supported to plan their studies according to some 'set goals' (Hao, 2005); a further problem has been that limited multi-media facilities hinder learners' self-access to on-line materials (Chen, 2006). During an experimental programme in a university in Shanghai, the *Autonomous Learning Model* failed compared to the *Teacher Talk & Practice Model*, and even compared to the *Teacher Talk Model* (Su, 2004, see detailed review in 3.3.5).

Multi-Media Facilities and the Internet

The Internet and multi-media technology have opened up opportunities to reorient teaching models. As Meskill (1999) acknowledges, technology is not in itself able to help learning, and the key is to combine the technology into everyday teaching-learning. However, problems arise when the investment does not meet the requirements of facilities; or when the available facilities are not made full use of. Further discussion on Computers / the Internet can be found in Chapters 2, 3 and 5.

Textbooks

The textbook is considered as one of the most important teaching-learning resources. Su (2004) argues that textbooks are irreplaceable because they not only provide learning

objects; they also systematically provide English knowledge in order that learners are able to master the language in the shortest period of time.

Textbooks and associated multi-media resources are a central element of the National English Teaching Reform. Four series of textbooks were designed for the Reform. Compared with previous textbooks, the new series focus more on developing listening and speaking abilities. These and other textbooks judged to be suitable are described and discussed in Chapters 3 and 5.

Testing

An effective evaluation system is of utmost importance to ensure an effective innovation. Hence, it is essential to change the testing system when the curriculum is reformed. Hughes (1989) argues that testing can positively influence teaching and learning, but it can also be harmful if teaching and learning only prepare for testing. That is to say, examinations and testing might encourage teachers to ‘teach to the tests’ and students to ‘learn for the tests’.

With the changing English curriculum in China, CET (see 1.1.2) has also been changed. CET is not the focus of this research, yet it has an important influence on English teaching and learning, therefore, it is discussed in more detail in Chapters 3 and 5.

1.3 Focus of the research

1.3.1 Motivation for the research

The study described in this thesis was designed in 2006, two years after the beginning of trial implementation of the National English Teaching Reform in China. The motivation for this research is rooted in both my own experience of living and studying in this English-speaking country and my experience as an English teacher in a Chinese university. I studied in the UK for one year before I started PhD study, thus, my own

experience of studying and living here with the language that I have been taught in China, as well as my observation of other Chinese students studying and living in this country made me feel that it is necessary for a change in College English teaching and learning in China. I might have already known English better than non-English majors, yet, I still found there was so much that I did not know. For example, I did not know the difference between ‘oven’ and ‘grill’ when I first arrived in the UK. Some students are not competent to communicate with native English speakers, and others have been in the UK for many years, yet still find it difficult to handle everything in English. Furthermore in recent years, I have observed many of the problems discussed earlier.

The Reform has been a costly and time-consuming process. The investment can be considered worthwhile if the Reform has been implemented fully or almost fully, and if the outcomes are as anticipated. If this proves not to be the case, weaknesses will at least have been identified and steps can then be taken to remedy these.

1.3.2 Focus of the research

The thesis reports research into a specific aspect of a major curriculum innovation. In particular, it evaluates the implementation of the Reform of National English Teaching with particular reference to teaching-learning of Listening Comprehension. Key elements of the Reform explored are the new Listening Comprehension curriculum, methods of teaching and learning Listening Comprehension, learner autonomy, the use of multi-media facilities and the Internet in English for teaching and learning Listening Comprehension, and the textbook.

English Listening Comprehension was selected as the focus of this research for three reasons. Firstly, the development of listening as a skill and as a channel for language input is seen as vitally important, because listening is ‘so prevalent in language use and it is the primary means of L2 acquisition for most people’ (Rost, 2002:103). The Reform has laid particular emphasis on listening and speaking; therefore, the development of the listening skills can be treated as one of the central objectives of the Reform. Secondly, this changed emphasis was reflected in the increased weighting for listening within the revised CET;

logically, this would therefore have a positive effect on student motivation. Thirdly, the Reform also aimed to develop learners' capacity for autonomous learning and one of the means through which this is to be accomplished is through self-directed listening practice using self-access resources.

1.3.3 Research questions

As noted in 1.2.1, the Guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education called for individualised teaching and autonomous learning using the web and multi-media technology. The central aim of this research was to examine the extent to which the Guidelines have been implemented. Specific questions to be investigated were as follows and a detailed introduction can be found in Chapter 4.

- Q1. What have the University authorities done to ensure implementation of the Reform?
- Q2. To what extent have the changes in teaching-learning of English intended by the Reform been implemented with particular reference to teaching-learning of Listening Comprehension?
- Q3. What use is made of the multi-media facilities by students and teachers to improve students' Listening Comprehension?
- Q4. What obstacles to the implementation of the Reform, if any, have emerged? To what extent could these have been anticipated?

1.4 Significance of the Research

It is hoped that this study will provide a baseline to allow other local researchers to continue investigations into the conceptions and beliefs about successful implementation of a curriculum innovation at university level in China. It can provide, for example, educational policy makers for English language, textbook editors, English language teaching software designers, and English teachers with useful information which can

determine what further changes are required, what problems need to be anticipated, and what measures can be taken to solve the problems.

The Reform was first introduced in 2003. Since then, there have been many research studies on the implementation, but none of these has focused on the same constellation of features as those investigated here. Of particular significance, therefore, is the fact that the research focused on a series of central and related aspects of the Reform: the use of multi-media facilities to teach English, the expectation that students would make autonomous use of the facilities to study English, and that their all-round abilities, especially listening and speaking, would benefit as a result. The significance of my research also lies partly in its timing. My pilot study was conducted in April 2007 and the main phase of field work lasted for three months from October to December 2007. At that stage, the Reform had been implemented nationwide for about two years. This seemed a reasonable point at which to assess which core features of the Reform had become established, with what effect, and what obstacles to full implementation of the Reform had emerged.

1.5 Structure of the Thesis

This research aimed to explore the curriculum innovation represented by the National English Teaching Reform in China with a particular focus on teaching-learning of English listening skills. Chapter 1 has provided a general introduction to the research background. Chapter 2 brings together reviews of a number of relevant areas of the literature. Chapter 3 provides further details of China's English Teaching curriculum and the National English Teaching Reform and reviews previous research related to the Reform. Chapters 4 and 5 focus on the research methodology and data analysis respectively. Conclusions are drawn in the last chapter.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Part I Curriculum Innovation: an Introduction

Chapter 1 provided background information on College English teaching in China, outlined the research focus and presented the research questions. This chapter reviews the literature on a number of topics relevant to the research. Part I introduces the notion of curriculum and distinguishes curriculum from syllabus; Part II deals with curriculum innovation; and Part III presents a selective review of the literature on designing/implementing a Listening Comprehension curriculum considered to be of direct relevance to the research. This is complemented by further discussion, in Chapter 3, of the research literature related to the College English Teaching Reform.

2.1 Introduction

Education can be regarded as a project that helps students to develop certain abilities. Through language education, learners are expected to learn how to read, how to write, how to listen and how to speak. They are also supposed to understand the culture of the target language. Language learners may also be shown how to study.

In developing goals for educational programmes, curriculum planners draw on their understanding both of the present and long-term needs of learners and of society, as well as their own beliefs. However, there is always a gap between intention and reality, or what is planned and what is implemented. Causal factors in the gap can be social, economic, political, learning environment, or learner differences. For example, Seliger (1983) argues that one reason for insufficient implementation is the context for the formal teaching of language that takes place inside the classroom. The language classroom is an artificial context for the use of language as a tool for communication in spite of the fact that efforts have been made to make it less artificial. Therefore, teaching is ‘designed’ or ‘planned’ by a curriculum to practise language. Whether this is effective or not partly depends on how the previously ‘planned’ curriculum is implemented. The other major reason for the gap

between the planned and implemented curriculum is that learners have their own interpretation of the 'planned' curriculum and their 'hidden agendas' (Nunan, 1988:141), which run counter to the official curriculum. When learners are put in a circumstance of a changing curriculum, their understanding of those changes and the instruction relevant to those changes varies because of the learners' different social background, family background, education background, and also the study environment in different areas.

Candlin (1983) comments on the importance of collective agreement about objectives, implementation and evaluation:

'The objectives of curriculum innovation in public educational systems can only be attained where there is a realisation by all key parties that these objectives are as far as possible to be pursued in a climate of participation and collective responsibility. In practice, this requires agreement to be achieved on the objectives, their manner of attainment and the procedures for evaluating the achievement by all parties who are involved in the curriculum process.'

(Candlin, 1983: 153)

From the above description, it is very important that all relevant parties need to be actively participating when the curriculum innovation is introduced. Furthermore, cooperation from all parties is vital to guarantee the successful implementation and innovation.

Nunan (1988) argues that in general curriculum development, 'the central focus should be on implementation rather than planning' (p.14). Moreover, he attaches particular importance on the role of teachers, and argues that curriculum changes will only find their way into the classroom if teachers themselves become the principal agents of curriculum changes through critical analysis and reflection on their current performance (Nunan, 1988). That is to say, the implementation of educational innovations requires alterations in behaviour expected of teachers.

The next section takes a detailed look at the stages involved from planning a curriculum to the evaluation of the implementation of an innovated curriculum.

2.1.1 Understanding a curriculum

‘Curriculum’ is a term that is used with several meanings. The viewpoints of teachers, students, parents, and government are all different and it is hardly surprising that educators themselves have defined it in different ways.

Some researchers take a curriculum to be a programme or a course of educational activities (see e.g. Gwynn & Chase, 1969; Hirst, 1973). Rudd (1973) prefers to focus on the outcomes, stating that ‘a curriculum prescribes or anticipates teaching results; but does not prescribe the means, i.e. the activities, materials or teaching content to be used in achieving these results’ (p.54).

Walker (1973) offers a more inclusive definition:

‘The phenomena of curriculum include all those activities and enterprises in which curricula are planned, created, adopted, presented, experienced, criticised, attacked, defended, and evaluated, as well as the objects which may be part of a curriculum, such as textbooks, apparatus and equipment, schedules, teachers’ guides, and so on. In addition to these actual objects, events and processes, the phenomena of curriculum can be, and in my judgment should be, interpreted to include the plans, intentions, hopes, fears, dreams and the like of agents, such as teachers, students and curriculum developers or policy-makers.’

(Walker, 1973: 59)

This definition describes a curriculum in more detail than Rudd (1973) to include curriculum plans and objects. Kerr (1971) uses the simple model presented in Figure 2.1 to represent the four components of a curriculum model:

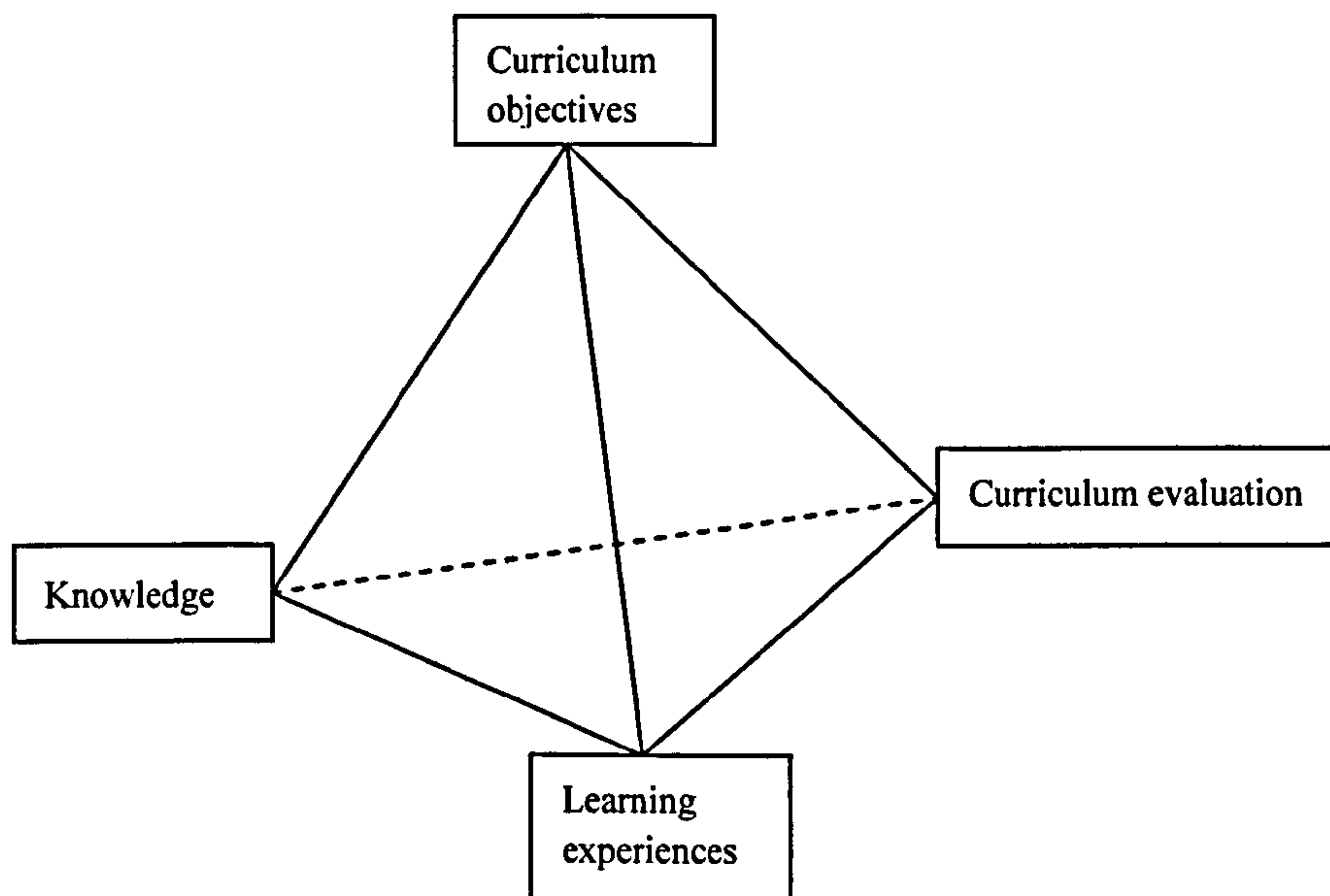


Figure 2.1: A simple model of a curriculum (Kerr, 1971: 182)

Figure 2.1 indicates how a curriculum is framed by objectives, knowledge, learning experiences, and evaluation. At the apex of the pyramid, Curriculum objectives dominate the framework, and each part is related to the other three, but this model does not illustrate the interaction among the components.

White's (1988) and Morris' (1996) understanding of the components is different from that of Kerr. White (1988) argues that the main components of a curriculum are purpose, content, methodology and evaluation; and the processes whereby a curriculum is developed, implemented and evaluated. Morris (1996) offers a different framework from Kerr (1971):

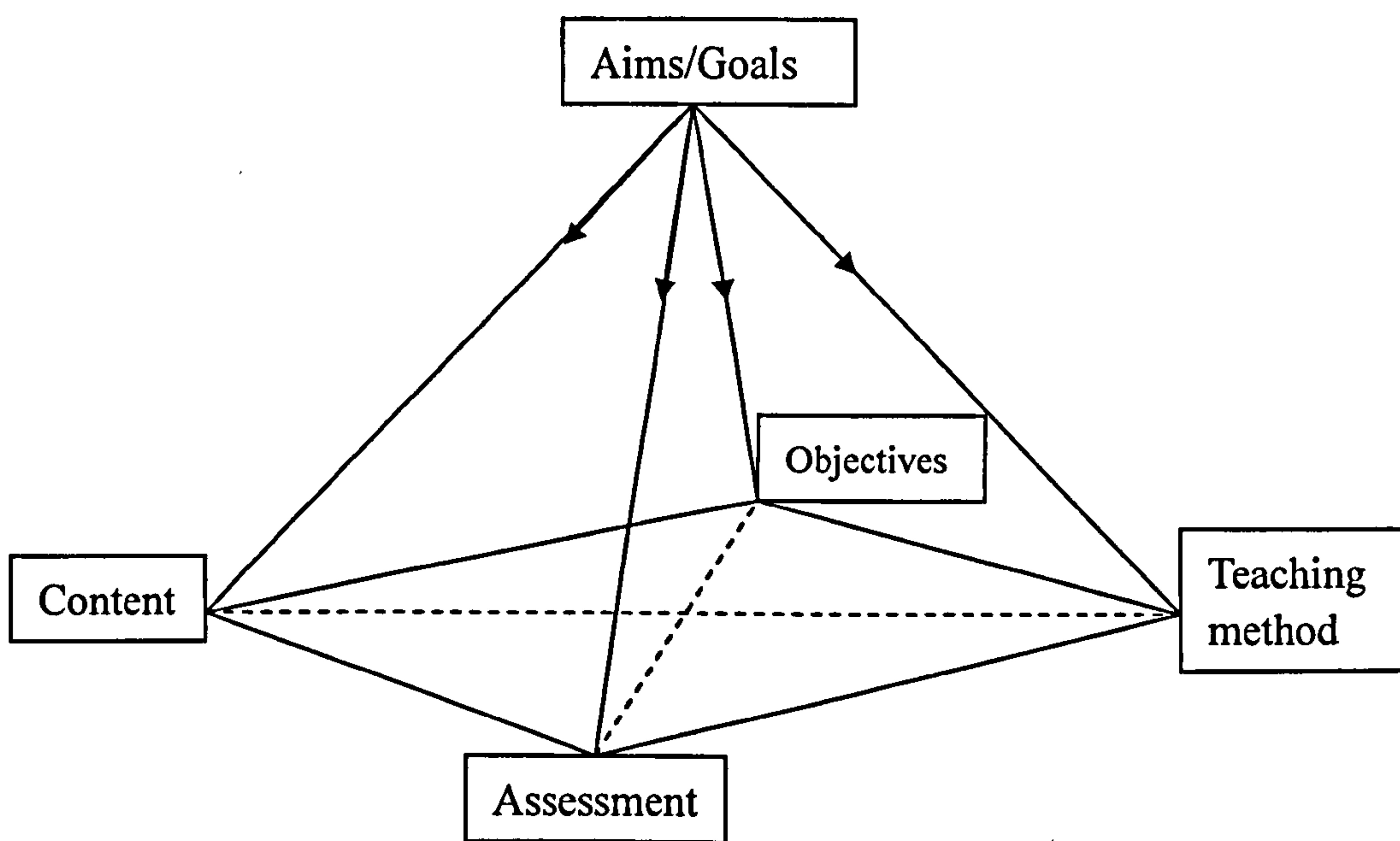


Figure 2.2: The components of a curriculum (Morris, 1996: 4)

This looks similar to Kerr's model, but there are important differences. Both figures are pyramidal yet there are only three factors at the bottom of Kerr's model, whereas there are four at the bottom of Morris'. This framework puts 'Aims/Goals' at the centre, that is to say, the aims/goals component of a curriculum determines the other four components, and the other four are on the same plane. 'Aims/Goals' are thus considered as more general and more influential than 'Objectives'. 'Aims' are 'idealistic, long term and focus more on a planned intention' (Morris, 1996:11); 'goals' are similar as they focus on a desired result but are more specific. 'Objective' is different in the sense that it emphasises the outcomes resulting from effort. Morris (1996) argues that objectives are 'specific and short term' (ibid). In Figure 2.2, the fact that 'Aims/Goals' of a curriculum is in a central position might be due to the broader educational aims of these terms, i.e., how the individual will benefit as a human being / citizen. As for the achievement of the 'Aims/Goals,' four terms (Objectives, Content, Teaching method and Assessment) are suggested in a curriculum. The other factors in Morris's model are also referred to in different ways from Kerr's. They both include the 'assessment' but Kerr's focus more on learners whilst Morris's have more emphasis on teachers.

There can also be another view of a curriculum. Tyler (1949) suggests the model for systematic development of a curriculum:

‘The development of any curriculum for any subject whatsoever must be based on a consideration of four fundamental questions. These are as follows: (1) What educational purposes should the school seek to attain? (2) What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes? (3) How can these educational experiences be effectively organised? And (4) How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained?’

(Tyler, 1949: i)

These four questions constitute a process as to how the educational purposes can be reached: a curriculum sets up a series of teaching-learning purposes, measures for successfully achieving those purposes and methods of achieving those goals. Furthermore, to establish whether the curriculum is effective or not, criteria are also set to determine whether the purposes have been achieved or not.

2.1.2 Curriculum and syllabus

White (1988) makes it clear that the terms ‘Curriculum’ and ‘Syllabus’ are used differently on either side of the Atlantic.

‘In a distinction that is commonly drawn in Britain, “syllabus” refers to the content or subject matter of an individual subject, whereas ‘curriculum’ refers to the totality of content to be taught and aims to be realised within one school or educational system. In the USA, ‘curriculum’ tends to be synonymous with “syllabus” in the British sense.’

(White, 1988: 4)

This thesis follows the British definition, which places syllabus in a subordinate position to curriculum. As clarified by Richards (2001), a syllabus is ‘a specification of the content of a course of instruction and lists what will be taught and tested’ (p.2). A curriculum, on the other hand, is a more comprehensive design than a syllabus.

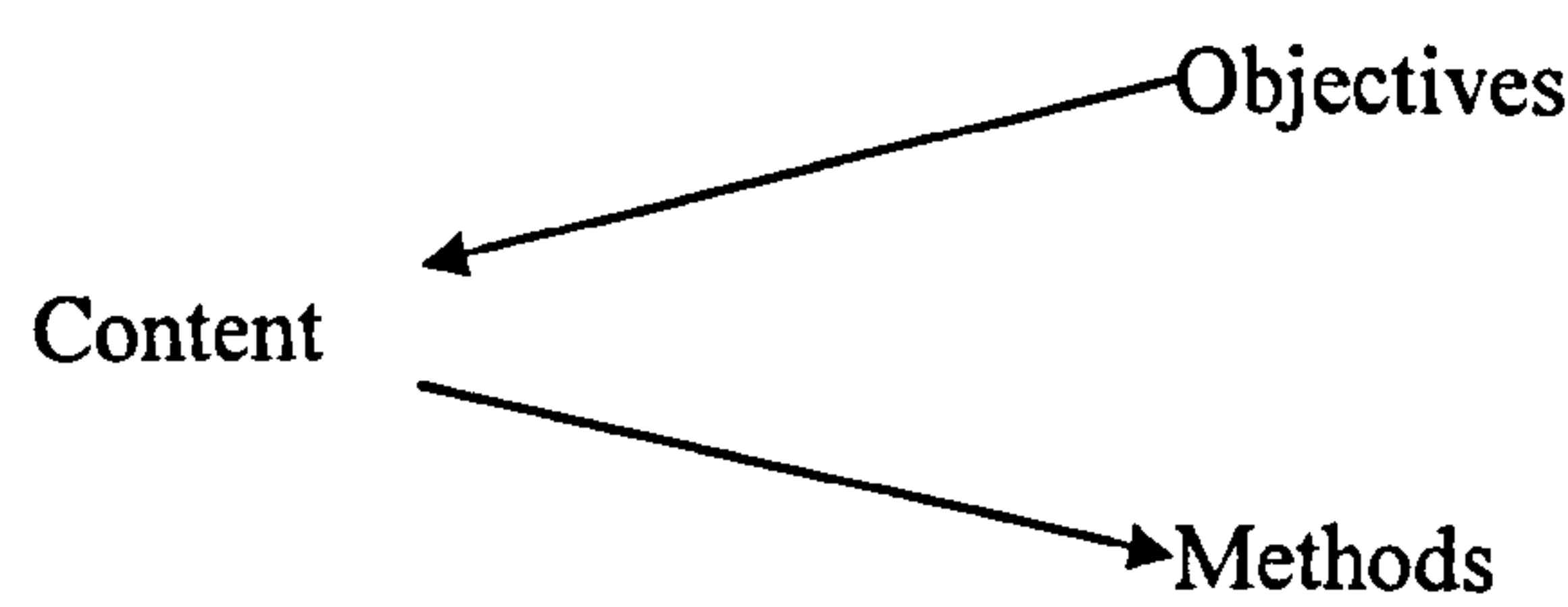
‘It includes: making decisions on the learning requirements of a group of learners; making decisions on appropriate syllabus, course structure, teaching methods and materials; and making decisions on the proper evaluation to testify whether the learning outcomes are in accordance with the preset aims.’

(Richards, 2001: 2)

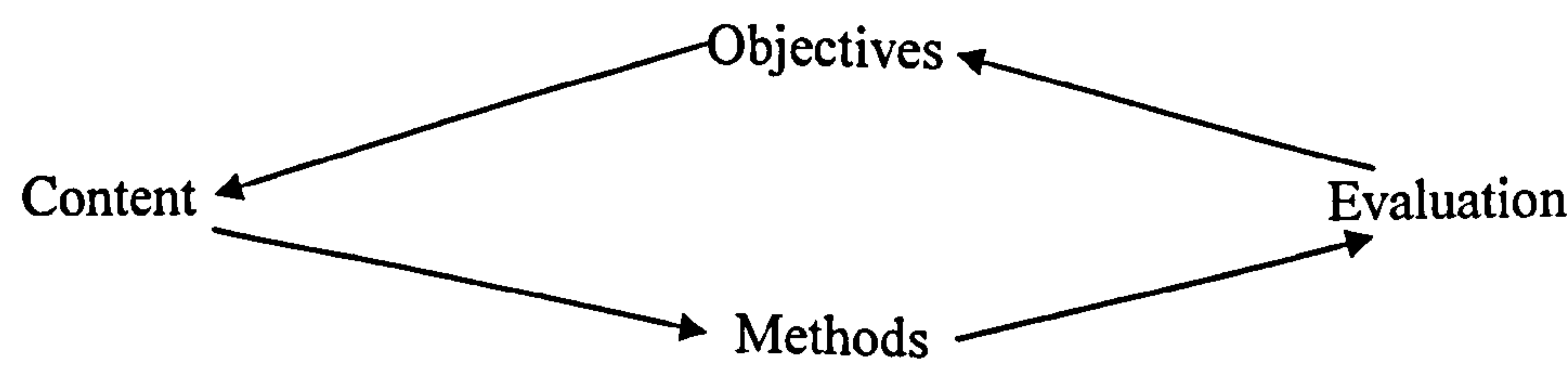
White (1988) also argues that a curriculum should not simply be seen as a kind of super syllabus. He offers the analysis of building a house. Firstly, a curriculum could be like a plan of a house yet to be constructed. In this sense, the curriculum is future-directed towards an object yet to be realised and it is, in essence, synonymous with syllabus.



Secondly, a curriculum could be seen to be like a plan of how to build the house. In this case, methods have been added to the model. The methods are the means by which the ends (the objectives) are to be achieved and this forms the basis of a process view of the curriculum.



Thirdly, a curriculum could be seen to be like the view of the house after it has been completed and is a dwelling for its inhabitants. The persons inhabiting it would decide whether it suits their requirements. This perspective adds a fourth and final element: evaluation. In other words, do outcomes match objectives?



(White, 1988: 4-5)

This is the view of curriculum that will be adopted henceforth, and Listening Comprehension within the Reform of College English will be treated as an example of a curriculum innovation. In the following chapters, the term ‘Listening Comprehension Curriculum’ will be used for the purpose of consistency and as an example of a curriculum innovation. However, ‘Listening Comprehension Syllabus’ is used on occasions (see e.g. 2.8.4) when there is a need to highlight the specification of the content of the course and how this will be taught.

Sections 2.3 and 2.4, which follow, focus on the objectives and content of a curriculum. The implementation of a curriculum is discussed in Section 2.5. The final stage of an innovation (as well as the initial stage of the next innovation) is the evaluation of the curriculum, and therefore, section 2.6 focuses on the evaluation of a curriculum. Sections 2.7 to 2.9 in Part III concentrate on the objectives, content and implementation of an English Listening Comprehension Curriculum. Figure 2.3 illustrates the framework of the chapter as a whole. Since consideration of how such a curriculum might be evaluated forms part of the research focus of this work, this is dealt with in Chapters 4 and 5.

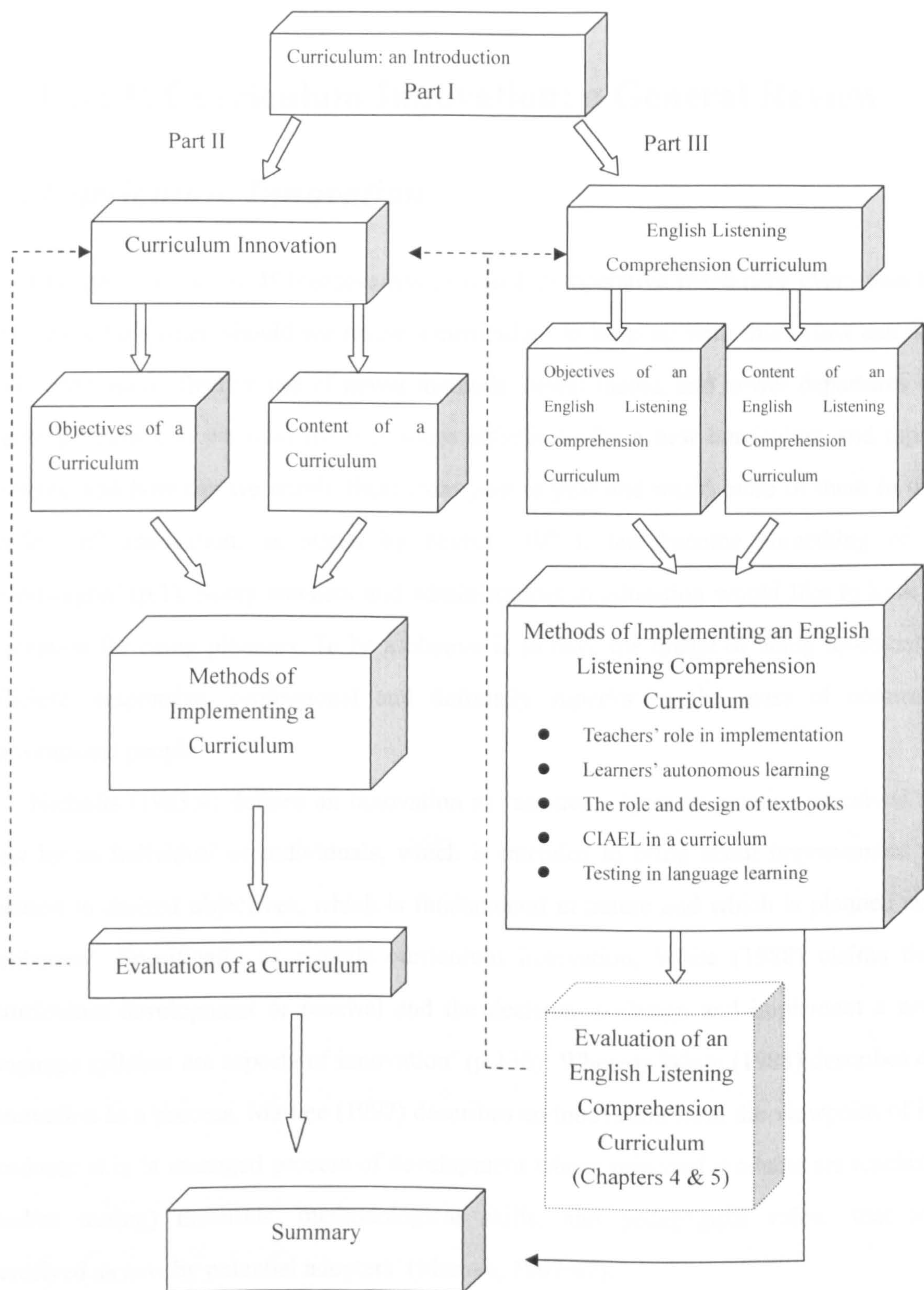


Figure 2.3 Framework of Chapter 2

Part II Curriculum Innovation: a General Review

2.2 Curriculum Innovation

Change is universal. If business has to retool its operative machinery every two to five years, how often should we revise a curriculum to keep up with this? How can we make maximum effective use of newer methods, newer media, and newer departures in teaching? How can we train teachers more effectively for a new curriculum and rapid changes, and how can we retrain them from year to year and retain more of them in the profession? Innovation, as stated by Nisbet (1975), has become something of a 'bandwagon' (p.1). Many teachers and administrators in education would like to have a reputation for being planners. To be a planner is to have the image of being up-to-date, efficient, responsive, professional and definitely superior to the mass of common conventional people.

Nicholls (1983:4) defines an innovation as 'an idea, object or practice perceived as new by an individual or individuals, which is intended to bring about improvement in relation to desired objectives, which is fundamental in nature and which is planned and deliberate'. Specifically as regards curriculum innovation, White (1988) claims that 'curriculum development or renewal and the decision to design and implement a new language syllabus are aspects of innovation' (p.136). Whereas White (1988) describes an innovation as a process, Markee (1997) describes an innovation from the viewpoint of its products: it is 'a managed process of development whose principal products are teaching (and/or testing) materials, methodological skills, and pedagogical values that are perceived as new by potential adopters' (Markee, 1997:47).

Innovations do not occur in isolation, they take place in a context, or a given social system. It is necessary to consider, when planning an innovation, that curriculum innovation always takes place 'within a matrix of cultural, political, economic, institutional, and administrative variables that directly influence the ability of project participants to innovate in meaningful ways' (Markee, 1997:172). Kennedy (1999a) also

states that

‘operating within a particular socio-political framework, government decisions are made at macro level about educational and language policy in international, national and organisational spheres, which in turn have effects on language learning and teaching.’

(Kennedy, 1999a: 2)

It explicitly clarifies the influence of social, economic and political factors on language learning and teaching. Morris (1996), writing about curriculum in Hong Kong, makes a similar point and further suggests that there could be other social factors such as the existence of a set of social values – for example those described as the ‘Confucian ethic’ in Hong Kong. Morris quotes Rozman’s (1991) argument on the key image associated with Confucianism. The East Asian concern for family and community, which may require them to submerge their individual yearnings in the interest of harmony and the pursuit of collective goals. Hence, the concerns and needs of individual pupils have been given a relatively low priority in a curriculum and the organisation of schools has promoted communal values such as cohesion and consensus.

Innovation means change, and change can occur through various processes. As regards the different approaches to curriculum change, Markee (1997) surveys five models:

1. *The Social interaction model* claims that diffusion is a form of communication; languages spread through the establishment of communication (Markee, 1997; Rogers, 1983; and Cooper, 1989).
2. *The Centre-periphery model* is ‘a system in which the power to promote educational change rests with a small number of senior ministry of education officials who are at the centre of the decision-making process. Teachers, on the contrary, are on the periphery of this decision-making process; they merely implement the decisions that are handed down to them’ (Markee, 1997:63). This model pushes teachers to implement the changes but discourages any development; therefore, it might not be effective in the long term.

3. *The Research, development, and diffusion model* assumes that developing good innovations depends on research efforts and the provision of high quality products to rational users in order to ensure adoption (Chin & Benne, 1976). This approach is dependent on ‘long-term planning and involves a division of labour among teams of specialists who work on separate phases of a project to develop a final product’ (Markee, 1997:65). This model is still expert-driven; hence, teachers still have little control over their success.
4. *The Problem-solving model* ‘enables the eventual users of an innovation to identify the need for changes’ (Markee, 1997:67). Teachers gather all necessary information to formulate and select appropriate solutions; this is followed by processes of adaptation, trial and evaluation.
5. *The Linkage model* adopts a ‘contingent’ strategy to solve the problems. In some situations, innovators simulate solutions for end users, whilst in other situations the end users have to adopt the appropriate resources (Markee 1997).

The above models show different causes of changes and processes of change; therefore, they can be used as references for a successful innovation in the sense that the particular changes properly serve the aims of an innovation. These models may be treated as guidance for curriculum planners as regards what to consider while innovating, what problems the innovation aims to solve, or how to implement the innovation.

After the innovation is initiated, White (1988) suggests several stages in the dissemination and adoption of the innovation as follows:

- ‘At an *early* stage, a very small percentage of planners decide to introduce new ideas;
- At the *second* stage, the early adopters, who have noted that the innovation produces no harmful effects, take on the innovation;
- During the *middle* stage, the majority adopt quickly, mainly influenced by the innovators;
- At the *late* stage, the laggards or late adopters finally give in. There is also a minority who never adopt.’

(White, 1988: 139-140)

These four stages describe the process of a non-problematic, or a successful

innovation. However, problems can be encountered in any of these four stages. At the *early* stage, innovators themselves may encounter difficulties during their planning and designing. At the *second* stage, the early adopters may encounter problems carrying out the innovation. At the *middle* stage, it is still possible that some problems will occur when there are more adopters. Finally, at the *late* stage, though most adopters have already acknowledged the innovation, those few who adopt late or never adopt may be strongly against the innovation or have a serious reaction. Therefore, those who have adopted may also be affected and problems may emerge accordingly. Problems or hindrances compel amendments or changes, that is to say, innovation can be an outcome of changes and can also be the cause of another innovation. Hargreaves (1989) introduces a cyclical, integrated view of three aspects of an innovation:

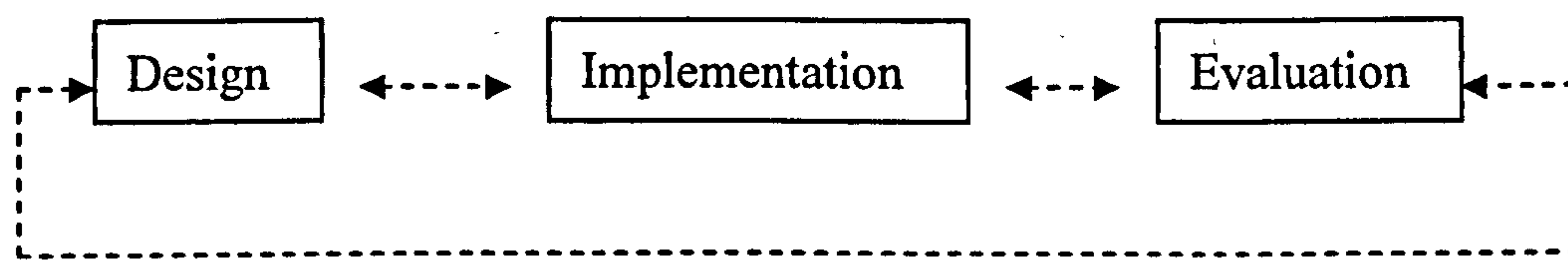


Figure 2.4 Three aspects of an innovation (Hargreaves, 1989: 35)

This diagram illustrates a self-improving, closed cycle of innovation process. Each aspect is indispensable to the others. Two-way arrows indicate the mutual influence between these factors. A design is put into use and then evaluated to see whether or not it is completely and successfully implemented. The evaluation induces reflection and amendments to design and/or implementation.

2.3 Objectives of a Curriculum

The objectives of a curriculum can be analysed as regards the supposed role of a curriculum. Richards (2001) sums up five curriculum perspectives: Academic rationalism; Social and economic efficiency; Social reconstructionism; Cultural pluralism; and Learner-centredness (pp.114-120). Each of these emphasises a different role of a curriculum. *Academic rationalism* justifies the aims of a curriculum as the intrinsic value

of the subject matter, such as learners' intellect, humanistic values and rationality. *Social and economic efficiency* focuses on the practical needs of learners and society. Social, economic, and other needs of society can be identified and planned for 'by task analysis, by forming objectives for each task, and by teaching skills as discrete units' (Uhrmacher, 1993:4). *Social reconstructionism* emphasises the roles both schools and learners can and should play when addressing social injustices and inequality. *Cultural pluralism* asserts that students should be prepared to participate in several different cultures and not merely the culture of the dominant social and economic group. *Learner-centredness* stresses the individual needs of learners, the role of individual experience, and the need to develop awareness, self-reflection, critical thinking, learner strategies, and other qualities and skills believed to be important for learners to develop.

A curriculum can be learner-centred in the sense that it is a collaborative effort between teachers and learners, as learners are 'closely involved in the decision-making process regarding the content of a curriculum and how it is taught' (Nunan, 1988:2). According to Brindley (1984),

'Education should develop the individuals' capacity to control their own destiny and the learner should therefore be seen as being at the centre of the educational process. For the teaching institution and the teacher, this means that instructional programmes should be centred around learners' needs and that learners themselves should exercise their own responsibility in the choice of learning objectives, content and methods as well as in determining the means used to assess their performance.'

(Brindley, 1984: 15)

That is to say, education does not simply mean teachers teaching and students learning some particular skills or knowledge; it also means that opportunities are available for learners to make decisions. It is up to the learners, instead of teachers, to decide what they wish to learn, to achieve, and even how to be assessed. What this implies is that teachers and educators will design programmes full of options so that learners may select whatever they need for individual learning.

It has been noted previously that a curriculum is affected by factors other than the subject, such as the political and economic environment. The objectives of a language curriculum are not only inclusive of achieving linguistic competence; a language

curriculum also ‘typically includes outcomes other than language-related objectives’ (Richards, 2001:133). Non-language outcomes might be:

- Confidence
- Motivation
- Cultural understanding
- Learning about learning
- Clarification of goals
- Access and entry into employment, and further study

(Richards, 2001)

That is to say, objectives in these domains could be related to personal, social, cultural outcomes. Jackson (1993) comments:

‘Non-language outcomes represent more than desirable or optional by-products of the language learning process. They are essential prerequisites for on-going and meaningful involvement with the process of language learning and learning in general. Non-language outcomes are thus teaching-learning issues strongly related to issues of access and equity for non-English-speaking background learners and workers. It is important that the development of knowledge and learning skills represent a significant component of the adult ESL curriculum.’

(Jackson, 1993: 8)

To sum up, the objectives of a curriculum cover learning purposes that are directly relevant to that subject, and also cover outcomes other than mere subject-related skills or knowledge. Therefore, a language curriculum should aim to develop learners’ linguistic knowledge, but at the same time it should also encourage non-language outcomes such as cultural understanding, self confidence and learning strategies.

2.4 Content of a Curriculum

The content of a curriculum is the means by which the above-mentioned objectives are to be achieved. In planning a curriculum, decisions are made about the content, and the skills and attitudes students are expected to acquire. However, learning outcomes are not the only content of a curriculum. Stenhouse (1975) suggests that a curriculum consist of three major parts relating to planning, empirical study and justification. That is to say, a curriculum is expected to explicitly include contents not only to guide teaching and

learning, but also to set guidance for empirical study and to justify the curriculum itself. The following table displays the major elements in a generalised curriculum model suggested by Stenhouse (1975):

Table 2.1 Major elements in a generalised curriculum model (Stenhouse, 1975: 5)

A. In planning: 1. principles for the selection of content – what is to be learned and taught 2. principles for the development of a teaching strategy – how it is to be learned and taught 3. principles for the making of decisions about sequence 4. principles on which to diagnose the strengths and weakness of individual students and differentiate the general principles 1, 2 and 3 above to meet individual cases
B. In empirical study: 1. principles on which to study and evaluate the progress of students 2. principles on which to study and evaluate the progress of teachers 3. guidance as to the feasibility of implementing the curriculum in varying school contexts, pupil contexts, environments and peer group situations 4. information about the variability of effects in differing contexts and on different pupils and an understanding of the causes of the variation
C. In relation to justification: A formulation of the aim or intention of the curriculum which is accessible to critical scrutiny.

Nunan (1988) acknowledges the value of this model in the sense that it firstly accords the central place of analysing what is actually happening in the curriculum process; it also realises the central role of teachers. However Nunan makes further demands of a curriculum. He suggests that a curriculum should be inclusive of ‘a task statement, a conditions statement and a standards statement’ (Nunan, 1988:61): the task statement specifies what the learner is required to do, the conditions statement specifies the conditions under which the task will be performed and the standards statement specifies the standard to be achieved. Nunan’s view of a curriculum seems to overlap with that of Stenhouse’s in the sense that his curriculum exclusively involves the learners: what they are expected to learn; how they are expected to learn; and what they are expected to achieve. It might be acceptable that ‘justification’ in Stenhouse’s be categorised other than the content of a curriculum. However, it might be more suitable to include the content for the purpose of empirical study.

As far as language teaching-learning is concerned, it is of utmost importance that appropriate decisions are made as to ‘what should be selected from the total corpus of the language and incorporated in textbooks and teaching materials’ (Richards, 2001:4). Considering the fact that learners are also encouraged to learn outside the classroom, it is very important that the curriculum also covers after-class guidance. That is to say, the content of a language curriculum might also be expected to cover both in-class and after-class teaching-learning requirements and supporting materials.

Section 2.8 further discusses the content of an English Listening Comprehension Curriculum.

2.5 Methods of Implementing a Curriculum

A curriculum innovation is meaningless if it is not implemented properly. In Elliott & Hughes’ (1998) case study, five teachers in three schools were interviewed about an innovation and conclusions were drawn as follows:

1. The demands of additional workloads brought about by the introduction of the Reform and the uncertainties of what it held for the future were considered excessive.
2. Teachers experienced growth in professional knowledge but at the same time felt a decrease in confidence in applying their knowledge.
3. The teachers and the schools were sometimes struggling to understand the curriculum areas because of some technical language used in the documents. Some schools tried to avoid those areas in order not to be placed in a problematic position.
4. The teachers valued the application of resources to assist them but were dissatisfied with the resources. They do not indicate whether the innovation is evaluated as successful or not.

The innovation was not a failure; however, many problems seemed to have occurred as well as some unsatisfactory outcomes. In addition, this was a small-scale research study which involved a small sample of teachers and schools; at the same time, interviews

were the only measure used, so there might have been other problems relating to other parties such as learners or authorities. In this section, factors affecting the implementation will firstly be discussed, followed by difficulties that may occur in implementing a curriculum.

2.5.1 Factors affecting the implementation of a curriculum

Fullan (1991) raises the simple implementation question: ‘What types of things would have changed if an innovation or a reform were to become fully implemented?’ (p.66). During the process of implementation, this question is continuously checked to make sure every measure is taken for the purpose of an ideal implementation.

Fullan (1991) discusses nine critical factors in the implementation process (Figure 2.5). These are organised into three categories relating to (1) the characteristics of the innovation or change, (2) local characteristics, and (3) external factors.

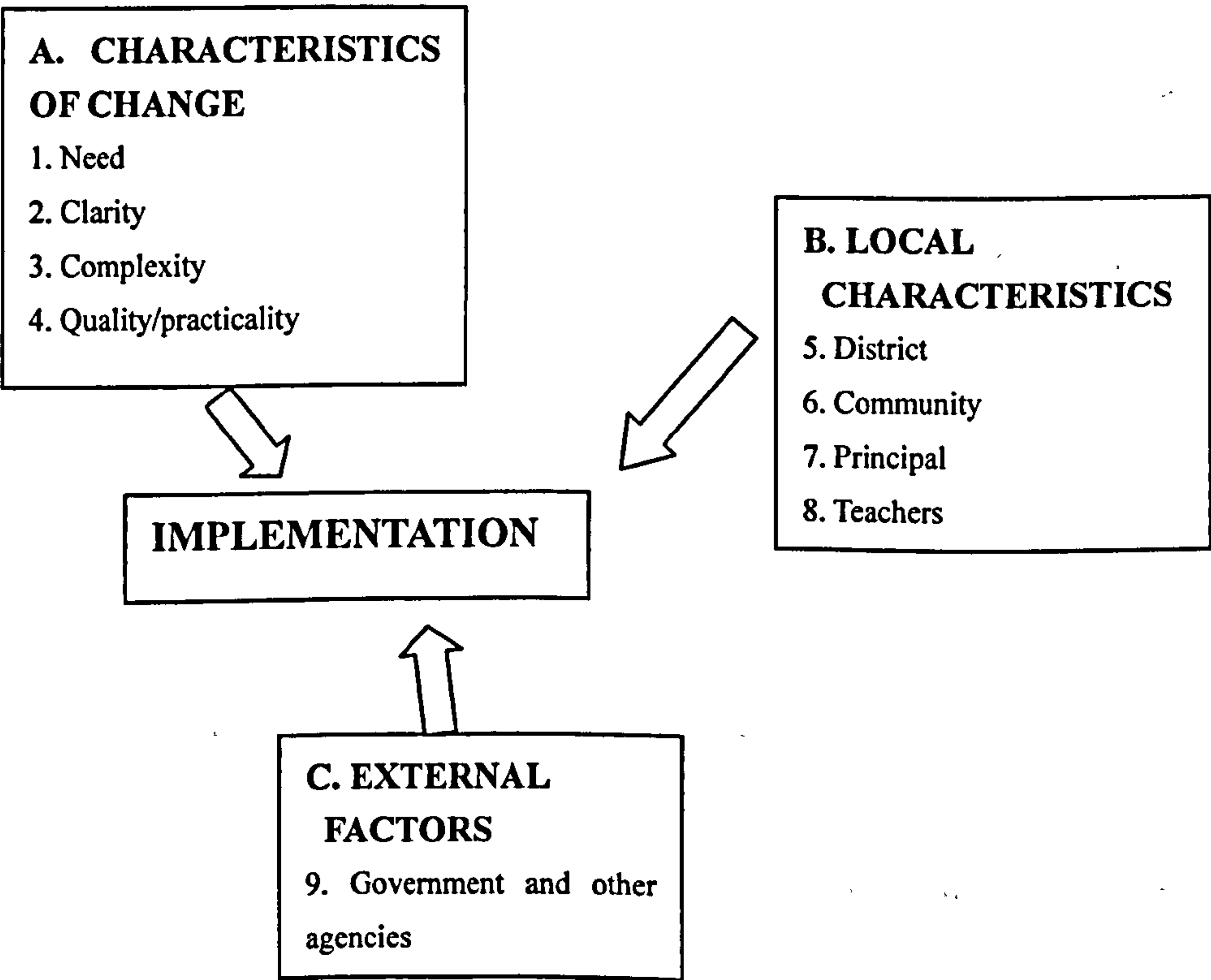


Figure 2.5 Interactive factors affecting implementation (Fullan, 1991: 68)

The nine factors can be understood as follows:

1. In relation to the characteristics of change, it is very important to relate *need* to decisions about innovations or changes of direction.
2. Lack of *clarity* – diffuse goals and unspecified means of implementation – represents a major problem at the implementation stage; teachers and others find that it is simply not very clear as to what the change means in practice.
3. *Complexity* refers to the difficulty and the extent of change required of the individuals responsible for implementation.
4. *Quality* of an innovation is an important factor relative to the other three variables (need, clarity, complexity). *Practicality* refers to the fact that the next steps have been outlined.
5. In relation to local characteristics, *District* factors include the district track records in managing change, psychological history of change, and the role of the district administration and central staff. (Fullan is writing from an American perspective).
6. The role of *communities* is quite variable, ranging from apathy to active involvement.
7. The *principal* of an institution strongly influences the likelihood of change.
8. Both individual *teacher* characteristics and collective or collegial factors play roles in determining implementation.
9. The *external* factors can be authorities, the society, technical assistance for implementation such as materials, consultancy, staff development, and so on.

This list constitutes useful guidance for planners and a possible analytical framework for researchers.

2.5.2 Problems in implementing a curriculum

Problems from innovating parties such as policy makers, planners or administrators

Innovation could be a ‘bandwagon’, as discussed earlier. At the same time, innovation inevitably brings problems. For example, some researchers (e.g. Wise, 1977; Fullan, 1991;

and Morris, 1996) looked into problems related to the policy makers, as well as their planning, their consideration of internal and external context, and the strategies they adopt:

1. The assumptions of policy makers, such as the government or principals in Fullan's (1991) categories, are frequently hyper-rational. That is to say, policy-makers might change the curriculum based on their hypotheses without any fundamental research and their expectations of some changes might not be rational or practical.
2. Implementation planning is itself a process of innovation. Has an appropriate implementation plan been prepared? A rational planning model may not result in goal attainment if there is no reason to believe the goal is attainable (that is, there are unsolvable problems). If the confidence that a goal is attainable is lacking, there might not even be any attempt to try.
3. The participants and the environment might be completely different from one case to the other. That is to say, one innovation can be successful in one background but a complete failure in another case. Have the characteristics of the context in which the change is to be implemented been considered thoroughly? Have the characteristics of the external context (social, economic and political) been considered as a whole?
4. The strategy used to try and bring about the change is key. Is the strategy suitable for realising the innovation? Inappropriate strategies might result in unexpected or negative changes.

The above-mentioned issues require planners to be more sensitive to the possibility that the change they have designed may not be completely correct and solutions to the problems may be discovered by inspecting these possibilities.

In order for implementation to take place successfully, as Johnston and Butler (1987) point out, 'the whole staff needs to participate in and own the curriculum development process' (Johnston and Butler, 1987:59). Implementation is only possible with efforts from all parties: innovating parties such as planners or administrators and adopters such as teachers or learners. Markee (1997) argues that it is essential that planners have a clear

idea as to ‘how the model they are using is actually going to promote a consciously willed and consciously articulated programme of change’ (p.175). To further clarify the role of the innovating parties, Markee (1997) continues with a list of their roles:

‘to *identify* a problem;
to *consult* with potential adopters to identify potential solutions;
to *clarify* misunderstandings;
to *solicit* suggestions for improvement;
to *modify* the proposed solutions using feedback received from potential adopters;
to *arrange* the development of whatever supporting resources are necessary;
to *implement* the solutions on a trial basis;
and to *evaluate* the solutions when enough experience is obtained.’

(Markee, 1997: 149-176)

As just noted, implementation does not merely involve the planners, but also the adopters and all those who have relationships with the innovation. We turn now to problems related to adopters such as teachers and learners.

Problems related to adopters such as teachers and learners

Implementation is a complicated process and might take longer than anticipated because the adopters might have their own perspectives and it takes time for them to interpret and follow the instructions. Rogers (1983:15-16) emphasises that ‘it is the receiver’s perceptions of the attributes of innovations that affect their rate of adoption’. Markee (1997) argues that when an adopter is considering the implementation of an innovation they need to undergo their own decision-making process; the extent to which innovations are accepted or rejected by adopters ‘is influenced by the personalities and previous experiences of participants and by a number of attributes (relative advantage, complexity, form, explicitness, etc.) that all innovations possess to a greater or lesser extent’ (Markee, 1997:172). Therefore, there needs to be room for flexibility so that participants can interpret curriculum guidelines in ways that are personally meaningful to them.

In order to fully implement as expected, subordinates have a right to expect management to perform certain tasks and duties:

- to take the necessary steps to provide them with a clear picture of their new role requirements;
- to adjust organisational arrangements to make them compatible with the innovation;
- to provide subordinates with necessary retraining experiences, which will be required if the capabilities for coping with the difficulties of implementing the innovation are to develop;
- to provide the resources necessary to carry out the innovation;
- to provide the appropriate support and rewards to maintain subordinates' willingness to make implementation efforts.

(Gross, Giacquinta and Bernstein, 1971: 210-211)

Adopters such as teachers may encounter problems of extra workload, loss of confidence, confusion and the threat of backlash (Nisbet, 1975). White (1988) also mentions extra workload, yet, he sums up several difficulties in a different way, as follows:

- Innovation involves changes in teachers' attitudes and practices.
- Innovation almost always leads to an increase in teachers' workloads. Such an increase can occur at all stages: in preparing for the change through staff meetings or in-service training courses; in planning lessons and materials; in adopting new roles and new techniques in the classroom; and in marking assignments, tests and questionnaires.
- Innovation requires extra preparation time and extra funds for new materials and equipment as well as additional funds for teachers' extra time. Extra time and funds are also involved when research is conducted and trialled.
- Where evaluation is concerned, there is an obligation to demonstrate that improvement has in fact occurred. Such evaluation may require the system to open itself up to outside appraisal and raise issues of accountability.

(White, 1988)

These difficulties are mainly relevant to teachers and the evaluation system. The

relationship between teachers and between teachers and administrators is also considered to 'play a major role in determining the degree to which an innovation is accepted or rejected' (Brindley and Hood, 1989:243). This will be further explored in the following part.

The relationship between innovating parties and adopters

The innovating parties might also be able to influence the adopters' decision-making process. Use of power may seem efficient in the short term, although users may behave mechanistically and superficially. Hence, in order to promote acceptance of the innovation on a deeper level, the adopters must be given choices and opportunities to work out their own understanding instead of 'being coerced into behaving or thinking in a certain way' (Markee, 1997:176-177). He suggests that the planners must 'energetically explain the relevance of the innovations to teachers, who may otherwise see them as intrusive, additional work that takes away time and energy that they could otherwise be devoting to their teaching' (op. cit: 174).

Parish and Arrends (1983) argue that planners and administrators control access and adoptions, whilst teachers control implementation. When an innovation is first introduced, teachers might not be trained well enough to decide what and how they should teach. Once teachers are trained, they then explore their own way of adopting the new curriculum. Breen, Candlin, Dam and Gabrielsen (1989) argue that every innovation will 'inevitably be reinterpreted by teachers in order to be made manageable for them in practice' (p.125). The outcomes can be different due to different teachers' understanding and personal experience. That is to say, a new curriculum might be implemented fully if teachers are competent and cooperative; at the same time, it is also possible that a new curriculum is misinterpreted and none of the objectives is realised because of teachers' misunderstanding or unwillingness or inability to comply. More detailed discussion on teachers' role and teaching process can be found in section 2.9.1.

Implementation is not a simple design-and-then-do model. Morris (1996) points out that curriculum plans are not always achieved in practice. Teachers often have to cope

with unexpected events, which mean that the plans are not always achieved. Moreover, many curriculum plans are only statements of an ideal which are difficult to achieve in practice because the teachers might not have the necessary resources, time or skills. Hence, curriculum implementation requires adequate support and co-ordination in the form of funding, time, resources and skilled support personnel. Support may include 'curriculum models and guidelines, counselling and bilingual support, and support from individuals acting in a curriculum advisory position' (Nunan, 1988:171).

Consequently, curriculum innovation can be viewed as an interactive process leading to the gradual improvement over time of both teachers and the curriculum. On the other hand, if the teachers and other participants do not change at the same pace as that expected by planners, or if no adjustment takes place when unexpected situations occur, then it can be regarded as a failed implementation.

The methods of implementing an English Listening Comprehension Curriculum will be discussed in detail in section 2.9.

2.6 Evaluation of a Curriculum

Once a curriculum is introduced, a number of important questions need to be considered:

- Is the curriculum achieving its goals?
- What is happening in classrooms where the curriculum is implemented?
- Are those affected by the curriculum, such as administrators, teachers, students and employees, satisfied with the curriculum?
- Does the curriculum compare favourably with others of its kind?

Curriculum evaluation is needed to answer these questions. Evaluation is essential in the sense that an innovation might be a failure and require radical amendments or changes, or more superficial problems may be identified that need attention. Effective and timely evaluation avoids wasted time as a result of imperfect implementation. As stated in Edwards *et al.* (2006), evaluation is central to the whole issue of designing a curriculum,

and criteria for judging an evaluation would be ‘not only that it should be appropriate to course level and reliable with equitable standards, but that it should encourage student reflection on work and indicate areas for improvement. It is important not to destroy confidence or encourage self-delusion’ (p.66).

Evaluation, as stated by Richards (2001), serves to ‘promote review, reflection, and revision of a curriculum based on careful compilation of information from a variety of different sources’ (p.298). The process involves measurement or assessment against agreed criteria. Hamilton (1976) suggests that ‘evaluation presupposes a scale of moral values against which the object of the evaluation can be assessed. Or alternatively, evaluation presupposes a set of practical criteria against which possible outcomes can be weighed.’ (pp.90-97). For Reid (1973), these criteria are ‘prescribed’.

‘We are concerned both with what is and with what might be – with description and prescription. What kinds of teaching are thought to be effective? What curriculum content and what teaching methods are actually implemented in schools? What kinds of outcomes do we actually expect from our curricula, and what outcomes do we actually get?’

(Reid, 1973: 94)

This quotation draws attention to the difference between the desired outcomes and the actual implementation of an innovation. In most cases, the evaluation of a project should proceed on the basis of specified criteria by which the success or effectiveness of a programme can be judged. Hargreaves (1989) argues that there is naturally a close relationship between the criteria and the original objectives. It is almost certain that the evaluation criteria are different from the original objectives simply because of the ‘dynamics of a project and changes that need to be made as it develops’ (p.39). Curriculum evaluation changes with the times, and the object of curriculum evaluation also changes with the changing definition of a curriculum. The evaluation strategies associated with particular types of curricula are largely a result of the central emphasis of the curricula. That is to say, different types of evaluation focus on different curricular aims.

Weir and Roberts (1994) define two major purposes for language programme evaluation:

‘accountability-oriented evaluation usually examines the effects of a programme or project and is usually conducted for the benefit of an external audience or decision maker. In contrast, development-oriented evaluation is designed to improve the quality of a programme as it is being implemented. It may involve those parties who are involved in a programme’.

(Roberts, 1994: 5)

Richards (2001:288) explains these purposes of evaluation in detail:

Summative evaluation (accountability-oriented evaluation) seeks to make decisions about the worth or value of different aspects of a curriculum. It is concerned with determining the effectiveness of a programme and its efficiency. It takes place after a programme has been implemented (Richards, 2001). For example, it looks at questions such as:

- How effective was the course? Did it achieve its aims?
- How well was the course received by students and teachers?
- Did the materials work well?
- Was the amount of time spent on each unit sufficient?
- What problems were encountered during the course?

(Richards, 2001: 288)

The purpose of this information is to determine whether a programme was successful and effective. The types of decisions that result from such analysis are fairly large scale and may result in ‘sweeping changes (for example, the continued funding of a programme or its cancellation)’ (Brown, 1989:229).

Formative evaluation (an alternative term for development-oriented evaluation) focuses on ongoing development and improvement of a programme. It aims to find out what is working well and what is not. For example, it looks at questions such as:

- Has enough time been spent on particular objectives?
- Have the placement tests placed students at the right level in a programme?
- Are teachers using appropriate methodology?
- Are teachers or students having difficulties with any aspect of the course?
- Are students getting sufficient practice? Should the workload be increased or decreased?
- Is the pacing of the material adequate?

(Richards, 2001: 288)

The purpose of these questions is to gather information that will be used to improve a teaching programme and its curriculum. The types of decisions that result from such an evaluation, as stated by Brown (1989), are ‘relatively small scale and numerous, and modifications and fine tuning of the existing programme design will follow’ (p.229).

Evaluation can be conducted in various forms, such as Tests; Comparison of two approaches to a course; Interviews; Questionnaires; Teachers’ written evaluation; Diaries and journals; Teachers’ record or report; Student logs; Case study; Student evaluations; Audio or video-recording; and Observation. The data resulting from evaluation determines whether a course needs to be modified or altered in any way so that objectives may be achieved more effectively.

Two types of participants are involved in evaluation: *insiders*, which refers to teachers, students, and anyone else closely involved; and *outsiders*, others who are not involved in the programme and who may be asked to give an objective view (Richards, 2001:296). Richards also classifies different levels of involvement in a language teaching programme and different kinds of audiences for evaluation:

- Students may be interested in questions such as: What did they learn? How will this help them in the future?
- Teachers may be interested in: How well did they teach? Were the students satisfied with the course? How useful were the materials and course work?
- Curriculum developers may be interested in: What aspects of the course need replacing or revising? Do teachers and students respond favourably to the course?
- Administrators may be interested in: Was the timeframe of the course appropriate? Were testing and assessment procedures adequate? Were resources made use of?
- Sponsors may be interested in: Was the cost of the course justified? Did the course deliver what was promised? Was the course well managed?

(Richards, 2001: 295)

That is to say, different participants may focus on different aspects of an innovation and this argues for explicitness concerning the audience(s) for an evaluation and careful planning in terms of the approach to be adopted.

Evaluation can be regarded as the last step of an innovation, but it can also be a starting point for a new innovation. Figure 2.6 shows an example from Bishop (1999), of

a continuous cyclical evaluation process, based on his research into CALL.

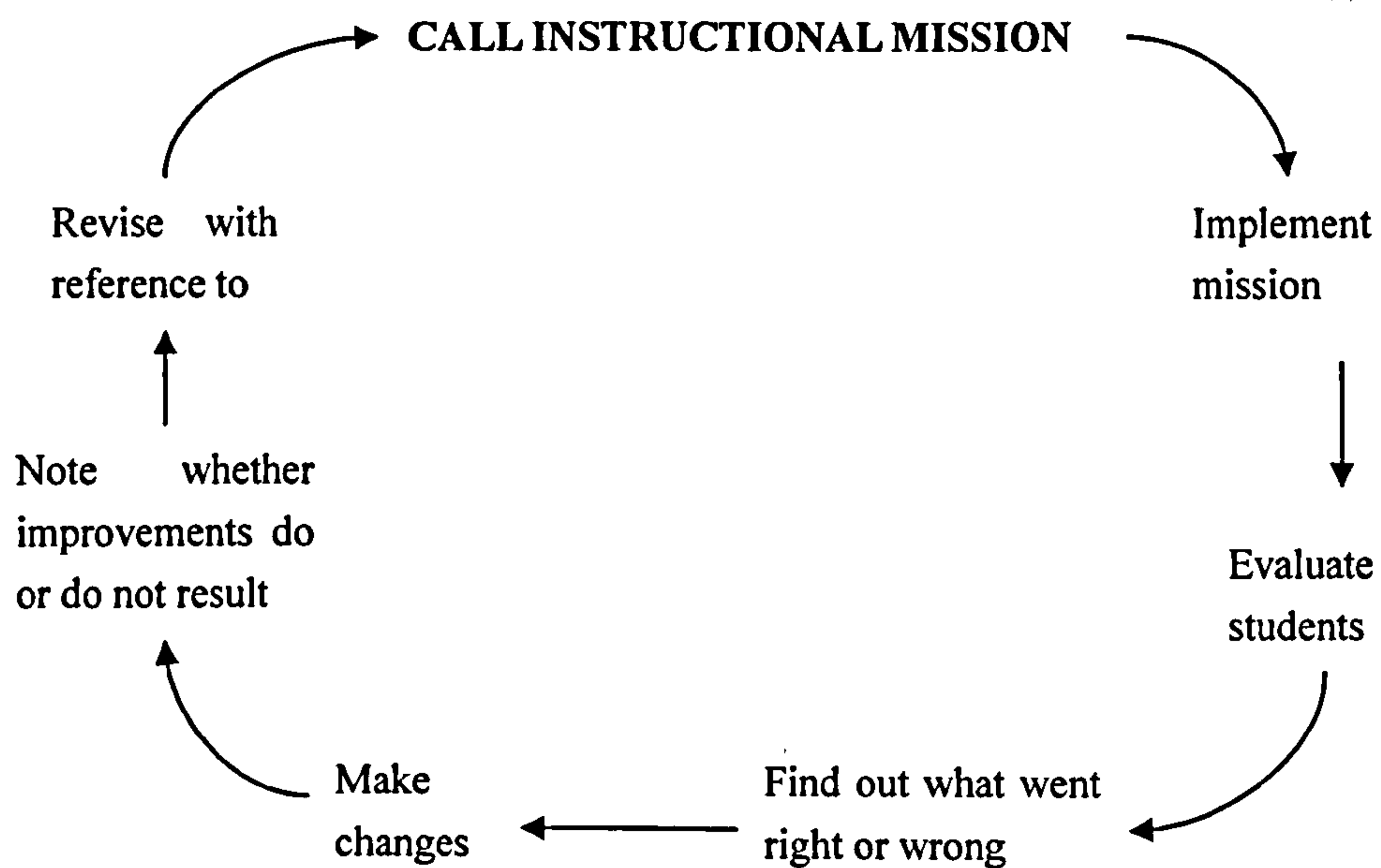


Figure 2.6 The evaluation process in a CALL environment (Bishop, 1999: 281).

This cyclical evaluation process is clearly not just limited to the field of computer applications: it can be extended to the evaluation of any curriculum innovation to ensure that this is a continuously improving process. The evaluation process may, of course, be much more complicated than indicated in Figure 2.6. For example, students are not the only party to be evaluated; there are teachers and other supporting parties such as technicians. It is also too simplistic to make a judgement on whether an implementation is '*right*' or '*wrong*', because some procedures might not be right according to the design / instruction, but prove to be appropriate and successful in some particular circumstance. Besides, this circle seems to be a simple input-output model without considering any unexpected situation and the possible consequences.

Part III Curriculum: an English Listening Comprehension Curriculum

The previous part of this chapter has discussed, in general, theories on curriculum innovation and the four components of a curriculum model, namely: objectives, content, methods and evaluation, since these have broad relevance for the context of the research, the National English Teaching Reform in China, which is described in Chapters 3 and 4. Bearing in mind the specific research focus of the thesis, Part III focuses primarily on the specific nature of an English Listening Comprehension Curriculum. Section 2.7 deals with the objectives of an English Listening Comprehension Curriculum; 2.8 discusses content; and 2.9 considers methods of implementing a listening curriculum. As mentioned previously, evaluation of a Listening Comprehension Curriculum is dealt with in Chapters 4 and 5.

2.7 Objectives of an English Listening Comprehension Curriculum

The close relationship between ‘use of a language and political power, socio-economic development, national and local identity and cultural values has led to the increasing realisation of the importance of language policies and planning in the life of a nation’ (Kennedy, 1984:1). An English Listening Comprehension curriculum may have several objectives. As discussed in 2.3, a curriculum can emphasise various aspects such as academic skills, social and economic efficiency, social reconstruction, cultural pluralism and learner-centredness. That is to say, besides the aim at improving learners’ listening skills, a Listening Comprehension Curriculum may aim at equipping learners with specific forms of linguistic knowledge as well as non-linguistic knowledge. According to Buck (2001), ‘linguistic knowledge includes knowledge of phonology, lexis, syntax, semantics, discourse structure, pragmatics and sociolinguistics. Non-linguistic knowledge includes knowledge of the topic, the context and general knowledge about the

world and how it works' (p.247). Buck's (2001) description is based on what learners need to interpret input. However, it is still necessary to emphasise both knowledge when designing a Listening Comprehension Curriculum. In addition to the aims relevant to learning outcomes (linguistic knowledge, non-linguistic knowledge, and listening skills), a Listening Comprehension Curriculum may also aim to familiarise students with resources to practise listening outside the class and to develop the capacity for autonomous study. In this section, considering the relevance to the research context, only three specific objectives are discussed, namely, the development of listening skills (section 2.7.1), encouragement / facilitation of autonomous language learning (section 2.7.2) and the use of computer facilities (section 2.7.3) as a means of realising the two primary objectives.

2.7.1 Improving English Listening Comprehension skills

One of the most important – and obvious – objectives of an English Listening Comprehension Curriculum is to enhance skills for the purpose of better understanding and better communication.

Researchers (e.g. Rost, 1990, 1994, 2002; and Underwood, 1989) have identified some listening comprehension skills that a listening curriculum should enhance.

Skills in a formal learning environment

Within a formal learning environment, objectives would include the importance of students' ability to cope with spoken input (e.g. teachers' instructions and explanation, lectures delivered through the medium of English) and interaction with other learners. The curriculum should also support students in preparing for the listening component of external examinations.

Skills in a non-learning environment

Besides the ability to cope with a formal learning environment, a Listening Comprehension Curriculum should also aim to equip students with the skills and

strategies to interact with other users of English outside the classroom / institution and thereby develop students' confidence in English-speaking situations. Moreover, it should encourage students to extend their access to English-speaking culture such as English movies and English songs.

Further discussion of Listening Comprehension skills can be found in 2.8.3.

2.7.2 Developing autonomy in language learning

One of the factors influencing learner progress is their motivation, as manifested in the willingness to practise by themselves whenever and wherever possible, and their ability to learn autonomously. On a basic level, learner autonomy in language learning is often set in contrast to learning that depends on teachers (Healey, 1999). Within the literature in English, the term 'autonomy' is, of course, used in a number of different ways, and it would not therefore be surprising if the concept is understood differently in different cultures. One of the most widely quoted definitions is that of Holec (1981), who defines autonomy as 'the ability to take charge of one's own learning' and 'to have and to hold the responsibility for all decisions concerning all aspects of this learning' (p.3) and Little (1990) argues that it is essential to the development of autonomy that learners 'become aware of themselves as learners – aware, for example, of learning techniques they instinctively favour and capable of judging how effective those techniques are' (pp.12-13). On a general level, students in a situation of autonomous learning are expected to take on an attitude of greater self-reliance and independence, and therefore actively search for their own way to enhance their learning. A great many other researchers have researched learner autonomy (see e.g. Brookes and Grundy, 1988; Holec, 1988; Dickinson, 1995; Broady and Kenning, 1996; and Littlewood, 1996) and five different senses of autonomy in language learning have been identified:

1. **situations** in which learners study entirely on their own
2. a set of **skills** which can be learned and applied in self-directed learning
3. an inborn **capacity** which is suppressed by institutional education

- 4. the exercise of learners' responsibility for their own learning
 - 5. the right of learners to determine the direction of their own learning
- (Benson and Voller, 1997: 1-2)

In China, there have been some similar terms when Chinese researchers review 'learner autonomy', such as 'self-instruction', 'self-access learning', 'self-directed learning' and 'self-regulated learning' (He, 2004; Xu and Zhan, 2004; and Hao, 2005). Literally in Chinese, '学习自主性' (xué xí zì zhǔ xìng) is used, officially and well accepted, when researchers are supposed to refer to 'autonomy'. To explain it more explicitly:

‘学习’	‘自’	‘主’	‘性’
xué xí	zì	zhǔ	xìng
‘learn’	‘self’	‘owner, direct’	‘nature’

That is to say, the Chinese version could be understood as either ‘the nature of learning by oneself’ or ‘the nature of self-directed learning’. It seems that a unique expression in Chinese has more than one meaning, and there are many terms in English similar to ‘autonomous learning’ with different meanings. Hence, it is worthwhile distinguishing these terms first.

‘Self-instruction’ refers to ‘learning without the direct control of a teacher’ (Dickinson 1987:5) and therefore is ‘a way in which learning is carried out’ (Pemberton, 1996:3). ‘Self-access learning’ is taken to refer to ‘learning from materials/facilities that are organized in order to facilitate learning’ (Pemberton, 1996:2). This places the emphasis on materials and facilities rather than the ability or the process. ‘Self-directed learning’ is similar to ‘Self-regulated learning’ in the sense that both terms refer to the ways in which individuals regulate their thoughts and actions. The former is defined by Dave (1975) as to ‘plan and manage learning by individuals (either singly or collectively) to accomplish their personal, social, and vocational development by recognizing specific learning needs from time to time and fulfilling them through suitable techniques, resources, and learning opportunities’ (quoted in Skager, 1984:18-19). ‘Self-regulated

learning’ refers to the process by which ‘learners personally activate and sustain cognitions, affects, and behaviours that are systematically oriented toward the attainment of learning goals’ (Schunk and Zimmerman, 2008:vii).

More research has been carried out on the terminology and definitions for similar kinds of approach to learning, whereas this research includes only the notions of ‘learner autonomy/autonomous learning’ and ‘self-instruction’. Researchers such as Little (1991) may argue that ‘it is the most widespread misconception that autonomy is synonymous with self-instruction’ because ‘autonomy is not exclusively or even primarily a matter of how learning is organized’ (p.3). In this article, these two terms are adopted as similar in the sense that ‘self-instruction’ refers to ‘attitudes rather than techniques’ (Dickinson, 1987:11) and ‘autonomy’ indicates the responsibility of learning (Dickinson, 1987) which can also be regarded as a kind of attitude. As a matter of fact, autonomous learning may have dual roles in a Listening Comprehension Curriculum: on the one hand, it forms one of the general aims of the curriculum; on the other hand, autonomous learning may also be one of the methods of successfully implementing a curriculum reform, which will be the focus of 2.9. In this section, autonomous learning is briefly introduced as one of the objectives of an English Listening Comprehension Curriculum, and in section 2.9.2, the topic is revisited with a focus on the factors influencing learner autonomy and how to realise autonomous learning. Teachers’ and students’ views of and attitudes towards autonomy will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Autonomous learning settings

Healey (1999:393-394) distinguishes four types of autonomous learning settings, as shown in Table 2.2:

Table 2.2 Settings for autonomous learning

<p>Type A. Programmed learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designer controls content, sequence, and evaluation • Student controls time and pace 	<p>Type B. Accreditation and training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher or designer controls content and evaluation • Student controls time, pace, and sequence
<p>Type C. Contract-based independent study</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student and teacher negotiate all aspects 	<p>Type D. Autonomy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student controls all aspects of learning.

Type A represents the *programmed learning* model of instruction. The teacher or instructional designer structures the learning by fixing the content and the learner controls the pace and the time of study. In addition, the sequence and the form of evaluation usually come from a teacher or instructional designer. This is a comparatively easy system for many students to handle because they are told what to learn and how to learn. At the same time, they have their own choices as to when to learn and how much to learn.

Type B is characterised by fixed content set by an external authority such as a teacher or accreditation party who also decides the evaluation. The learner can choose the time, the pace, and the order of progression. This type is suitable for those who know what is more important for them, or those who have formed their own learning habits.

Type C is structured by the teacher, who may suggest or guide the pace or route to take account of the learner's needs and preferences, but the final decision is made jointly or by the learner. Evaluation should be agreed ahead of time. It might seem ideal for students to discuss everything with teachers, yet learners may need to be prepared to take an active part in this negotiation. Moreover, this may also be time-consuming because a great many decisions need to be made.

Type D is the most flexible setting and the least common type. A teacher is involved only as an optional source of information and guidance. Furthermore, there exist some learners with fully autonomous learning attitudes who do not need any teacher or institution for learning to occur.

In reality, these four settings are not rigidly separated because there could be a combination of any of these settings to fit a student's own learning style. For example,

Type C may be suitable for Spoken English tasks and Type B for Listening Comprehension practice. In other situations, Type D may be better for Listening Comprehension improvement and Type A for English writing.

Furthermore, learning 'does not take place in a vacuum and self-direction does not mean learning on your own' (Pemberton, 1996:6); therefore, autonomous learning is influenced by factors such as social or political aspects, and teachers. Further discussion of autonomous learning can be found in 2.9.2.

2.7.3 Encouraging the use of computer facilities

As mentioned in 2.7.1 and 2.7.2, self-motivated or self-paced learning is one of the factors that can influence the improvement of Listening Comprehension ability. Computer facilities have an obvious part to play in this.

CALL (Computer-Assisted Language Learning) was a term first agreed upon at the 1983 TESOL convention in Toronto in a meeting of interested participants. It may be defined as the process in which language is taught and learned partly with the aid of the computer (Levy, 1997; and Beatty, 2003). Interest in CALL developed with the increasing availability of computers; its current nature is a reflection of the level of development of the technology (see Figure 2.7):

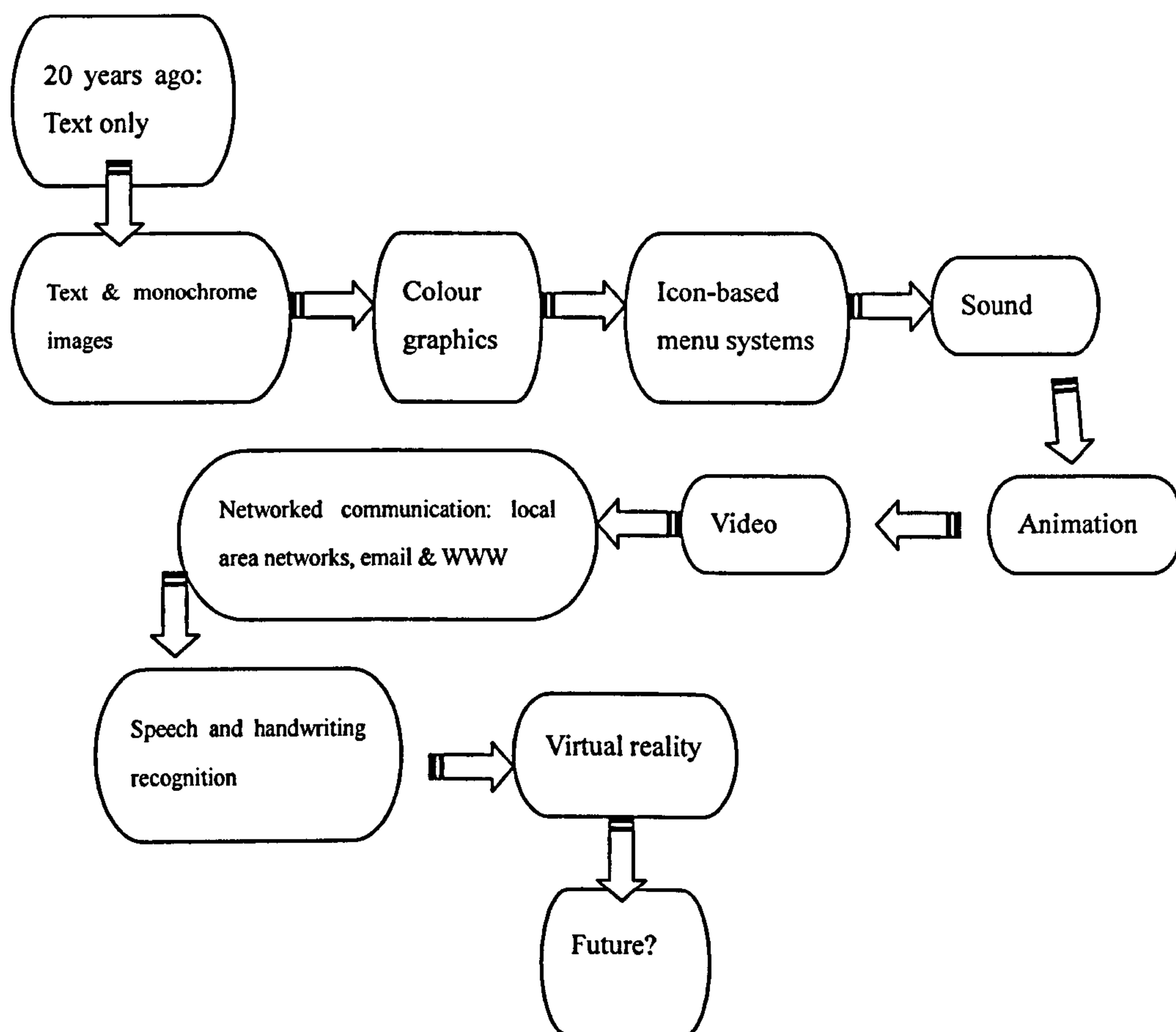


Figure 2.7: Improvements in computer technology (developed from Sussex, 1991; Levy, 1997 and Beatty, 2003)

Levy (1990) notes that ‘our language teaching philosophy, method, or approach needs to be broadened to encompass new technologies, and the inter-relationship between language teaching and computing needs to be carefully explored’ (p.5). Educational technologies such as multi-media on the computer, the Internet, chat room, and e-mail allow input by pictures, graphics, animations, video, and sound; and students have almost complete control over the number of repetitions and the amount of non-language media support and instant replay from any point in an audio or video presentation. Moreover, students may ‘respond to multi-media stimuli, not just by hitting a key or a button but by producing answers in the form of text, audio, and even video’ (Hanson-Smith, 1999:189).

The computer can provide a combination of text, pictures, sound, animation and video. For improving listening comprehension abilities, Cauldwell (2004) argues that the computer has a role in all stages of the construction and teaching of listening comprehension exercises. That is to say, besides the advantage of self-paced learning and

motivated practice of listening using computers, the computer can provide a great variety of listening materials and help with the design of listening comprehension exercises. For example, the computer is helpful to ‘identify those parts of a recording which are likely to challenge the students by using some software’ (Cauldwell, 2004:211) and ‘provides a number of different ways of dividing up and annotating the stream of speech which make it possible to observe and internalise the features of natural fast spontaneous speech’ (op. cit: 203).

More detailed discussion of the application of computer facilities is included in section 2.9.4.

2.8 Content of an English Listening Comprehension Curriculum

In order to establish what might be appropriate content for an English Listening Comprehension Curriculum, it is helpful to understand firstly, the factors influencing Listening Comprehension (2.8.1); secondly, the difficulties students experience when listening (2.8.2); thirdly, skills in listening comprehension (2.8.3); and lastly, the content of an English Listening Comprehension Syllabus (2.8.4). As clarified in 2.1.2, ‘Listening Comprehension Syllabus’ is used, instead of ‘Listening Comprehension Curriculum’ in 2.8.4 because a need is seen to highlight the specification of the content of the course and what will be taught.

2.8.1 Factors influencing Listening Comprehension

What does ‘listening’ mean? When one is listening to something or somebody, it does not mean that they understand what the speaker actually hopes to deliver by that utterance. Understanding is based on what a listener has heard, but understanding is much more than just listening to the speaker’s utterance. As Underwood (1989) states:

‘Listening is the activity of paying attention to and trying to get meaning from something we hear. To listen successfully to spoken language, we need to be able to work out what speakers

mean when they use particular words in particular ways on particular occasions, and not simply to understand the words themselves.'

(Underwood, 1989: 1)

What a speaker means lies only partly in the words; listeners must interpret what the message implies. Hence, students need to learn to use more than their knowledge of language structure or vocabulary; they also need to 'establish or elaborate the context to which it relates' (Underwood, 1989:4). Hence, the factors involved are not only from the side of the listener but the speaker as well. Has the speaker correctly judged the level of background knowledge of the listener? Does the speaker present too much information? Does the speaker use too many anaphoric terms? Does the speaker shift topic without indicating this (Samuels, 2001)?

Brown and Yule (1983) categorise factors influencing oral language tasks as follows:

1. The speakers: the number of the participants, the speed of their speech, and their accent;
2. The listeners: the role of the listeners, participants or eavesdroppers, the level of response required, the individuals' interest in the topic;
3. The content: grammar, vocabulary, information structure, background knowledge;
4. Support: whether there exist pictures, diagrams or other visual aids to support the context.

Their research focuses more on spoken language, yet this category can also be used to describe factors influencing Listening Comprehension.

On practical grounds, knowing the range of factors influencing listening can guide the design of a Listening Comprehension programme. Nunan (1995) concludes that not only does successful listening involve information from the message itself, but on the knowledge of the world brought forward by the listeners. That is to say, listeners do not just passively listen to whatever the input provides, they draw on their background knowledge to make sense of what they hear. Elaborating on this, Samuels (2001) groups the factors influencing listening into two categories: inside-the-head factors and

outside-the-head factors (see Table 2.3).

Table 2.3 Factors influencing language comprehension (Samuels, 2001: 184)

Inside-the-head factors	Outside-the-head factors
1. Intelligence	1. Discussion topic
2. Language facility <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Accuracy and automaticity● Vocabulary● Syntax● Dialect and idiolect● Anaphoric terms	2. Speaker awareness of audience needs
3. Background knowledge	3. Clarity and speaker effectiveness
4. Speech registers (the style of language used in a particular social context) and awareness of contextual influences	4. Context
5. Metacognitive strategies (self-monitoring and self-regulatory mechanisms used by an active problem solver who wishes to achieve a goal)	
6. Kinaesthetics (nonverbal signals such as facial expressions, eye-contact and direction of gaze, hand gestures and body motions)	
7. Motivation	

Although the outside-the-head factors lie largely outside the listeners’ control, inside-the-head factors are more significant to be controlled as they are listener-dependent. Some of the factors have already been discussed (eg. Speakers and Topic), and some are self-evident (eg. Language facility and Kinaesthetics). Others need some comment.

1. The first ‘inside’ factor is intelligence. According to Samuels (2001), most students have ‘the necessary level of functioning to make sense of what the speaker is saying’ (p.183). Lenneberg (1967), similarly, concludes that intelligence correlates quite poorly with language development.
2. ‘The message might be lost if listeners fail to segment analyse speech accurately and automatically into appropriate morphemes; the reason may be the listeners’ limited attention’ (Samuels, 2001:185). It is also possible that the message is lost because listeners failed to catch what they have heard.

3. Listeners vary in their background knowledge, and therefore their ability to make sense of texts on different topics (i.e. this inside-the-head factor relates in one sense to discussion topics, an ‘outside’ factor).
4. Comprehension of others’ speech is affected by listeners’ metacognitive strategies and motivation.

2.8.2 Difficulties of Listening Comprehension

Most foreign language learners (as opposed to second language learners) are not living in an environment that allows them to listen to and practise that language, therefore certain problems are inevitable when they attempt to listen to and understand the language.

Underwood (1989) sums up seven types of problems students typically encounter when learning to listen.

1. Compared with reading comprehension, the listener cannot control how quickly a speaker speaks. They may struggle to catch what they hear and miss the next part.
2. It is not always possible for the listener to get the speaker to repeat an utterance. This is particularly the case when listening to the radio, watching television and participating in conversations outside the classroom. Even in classroom teaching, it is the teacher who makes the decision as to whether a programme is played once or more than once.
3. Choice of vocabulary is in the hands of the speaker, not the listener. An unknown word can be a major barrier for an L2 listener; consequently the listener stops and thinks about the meaning of the word and misses the next part of the utterance.
4. Signals indicating a speaker’s topic-switch can easily be missed.
5. Students may fail to interpret the words they hear due to their unfamiliar context, even if they understand the ‘surface’ meaning.
6. Even the shortest break in attention can seriously affect comprehension.
7. Specific teaching procedures, such as repeating the words carefully by speaking

slowly and pausing frequently, actually hinder the development of confidence and competence.

Some of these problems are relevant to learners' attention or teaching procedures. Most of them are due to the receptive role of the listeners, compared with speakers and teachers.

Based on a number of experiments with listening tasks, Anderson and Lynch (1988) conclude that a number of factors affect the ease or difficulty of a task:

1. The organisation of information: texts in which the order in which the information was presented matched its chronological sequence in real life were easier than texts in which the information was presented out of sequence.
2. The familiarity of the topic.
3. The explicitness and sufficiency of the information.
4. The type of referring expressions used: for example, use of pronouns rather than complete noun phrase referents made texts more difficult.
5. Static or dynamic relationship: whether the text described 'static' relationships, for example, geometric figures, or dynamic relationships, for example, a road accident.

(Anderson and Lynch, 1988: 48-56).

All these factors stem from the input itself. However, the strategies used by a learner to comprehend may also be more or less effective. A frequently-cited distinction is made between 'Bottom-up' processing and 'Top-down' processing or how listeners use the information available or relevant to help them interpret what they have heard (see e.g. Brown, 1990; Rost, 1990; Buck, 2001; and Flowerdew and Miller, 2005).

In 'Bottom-up' processing, the acoustic input is first decoded into phonemes, which is then used to identify individual words. The processing continues to form phrases, clauses, and sentences, and finally sentences combine to establish concept and understanding. However, Listening Comprehension can alternatively be regarded as a 'Top-down' process in the sense that listeners utilize their world knowledge or knowledge of the topic and context to predict and make sense of language input.

Listeners of different levels may adopt different strategies in different circumstances.

When the background knowledge is available, it is possible for them to use ‘Top-down processing’ to make use of what they have heard. ‘Bottom-up’ processing can then be used to check the understanding.

If listeners only have access to ‘Bottom-up’ processing, their information sources are basically from phonemes to words and until the sentences are understood as a whole. Therefore, there might be difficulties at any stage of this process. That is to say, difficulties might occur when they fail to distinguish some words; or even if they understand those words, they might still fail to understand what they have actually heard because they are not able to combine all the information into meaningful concepts. Faerch and Kasper (1986) argue that many second-language listening problems are due to insufficient linguistic knowledge, or a lack of socio-cultural knowledge. That is to say, second-language listeners have a restricted knowledge of the language; at the same time, they often lack important social-cultural knowledge that could help them compensate for their lack of linguistic knowledge (see e.g. Long, 1989; Chiang and Dunkel, 1992; and Bremer *et al.*, 1996).

2.8.3 English Listening Comprehension skills

Section 2.8.1 presented factors influencing Listening Comprehension, and section 2.8.2 dealt with the difficulties of Listening Comprehension. As discussed in 2.8.2, listening is difficult when there is a gap in understanding because of linguistic knowledge or background knowledge; therefore, listeners may tend to compensate by using any other available information such as visual information or common sense. Some successful language learners, for example, use their understanding of the communicative situation, the speakers or the topic under discussion to help them understand what is being said.

For Field (1998) the listening skill can be classified into three target areas: ‘firstly, the types of listening: whether it is for gist or for information; secondly, the ability to make sense of discourse features: reference or markers; thirdly, the use of techniques, whether it is predicting or anticipating’ (p.113). We might summarise these more broadly as listeners’ subjective purposes and use of linguistic support and interpretive strategies.

This implies that according to the nature of the listening task, different levels of attention are needed and different skills are used, for example, deeper attentional focus is needed for information than for gist.

The following sections explore each of these aspects of the listening skills: the use of linguistic support, the integration of linguistic and non-linguistic skills, and the exploitation of listening strategies.

Linguistic support

The basic abilities of a listener, according to Ur (1984), include: to hear the sounds; to understand intonation and stress; to cope with redundancy and ‘noise’; to predict; to understand colloquial vocabulary; to understand different accents and to use visual and aural environment clues. These abilities are not isolated, of course; learners must synthesise these abilities to understand speech. Brown (1990) suggests that learners may use phonological cues at the beginning of learning a language; competent listeners may use contextual information; and active listeners may also draw inferences. Rixon (1986) offers a rather different elaboration of successful listening skills at three levels, from the lowest Level 3 to the highest Level 1:

Table 2.4 Three levels of successful listening skills (Rixon, 1986: 29)

Global message Level 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Understanding the focus and the organisation of what the speaker is saying- Making inferences- Combining the sense of all the separate pieces of information in the text, so as to understand the whole message
Grammar and vocabulary Level 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Understanding the meaning of individual pieces of information in the text- Understanding the meaning of particular grammatical structures in the text- Understanding the meaning of the vocabulary used in the text
Sound system Level 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Recognising the words used by the speaker- Distinguishing and recognising sounds correctly

These three levels are based on the traditional idea of different levels of linguistic operation. Field (2008) also argues that only when listeners are able to divert some of their efforts from word recognition are they able to allocate resources to understand what they have heard. However, the use of non-linguistic elements is also important.

The integration of linguistic and non-linguistic skills

Rost (1991) argues that listening skills are a combination of both linguistic and non-linguistic aspects, involving an integration of the following component skills:

Table 2.5 Listening skills (Rost, 1991: 3-4)

Perception skills	1. Discriminating between sounds 2. Recognising words
Analysis skills	3. Identifying grammatical groupings of words 4. Identifying ‘pragmatic units’ – expressions and sets of utterances which function as whole units to create meaning
Synthesis skills	5. Connecting linguistic cues to paralinguistic cues (intonation and stress) and to non-linguistic cues (gestures and relevant objects in the situation) in order to construct meaning 6. Using background knowledge (what we already know about the content and the form) and context (what has already been said) to predict and then to confirm meaning 7. Recalling important words and ideas

As the numbers indicate, the lowest level is that of perception, a linguistic skill. At other levels, eg. 5 and 6, non-linguistic skills (knowledge) are also involved. That is to say, listening requires the ability to recognise sounds and words and combine these into meaningful units, at the same time, it also requires the ability to use context and a wide range of knowledge.

Listening strategies

However, even though listeners have good listening ability, they may still not be able to understand what is being said. Therefore, some conscious action is needed to use these skills effectively; this has been referred to as a ‘listening strategy’ (Rost, 1991: 4). Examples of such strategies are as follows:

Table 2.6 Listening strategies (Rost, 1991: 5)

Social strategies	Thinking about the situation: How should I deal with this situation? What is my relationship to the speaker? How can I get clarification?
Goal strategies	Thinking about a plan: How should I organise what I hear? How should I plan my response? What is my goal for listening?
Linguistic strategies	Activating language knowledge: What words should I pay attention to? What unknown words and expressions can I guess?
Content strategies	Does this make sense in view of what I already know about the topic? What can I predict?

In addition, one’s intuitions about the relationship between speakers can also be used as a strategy. The process of successful listening as a combination of essential skills and strategies is illustrated in Figure 2.8:

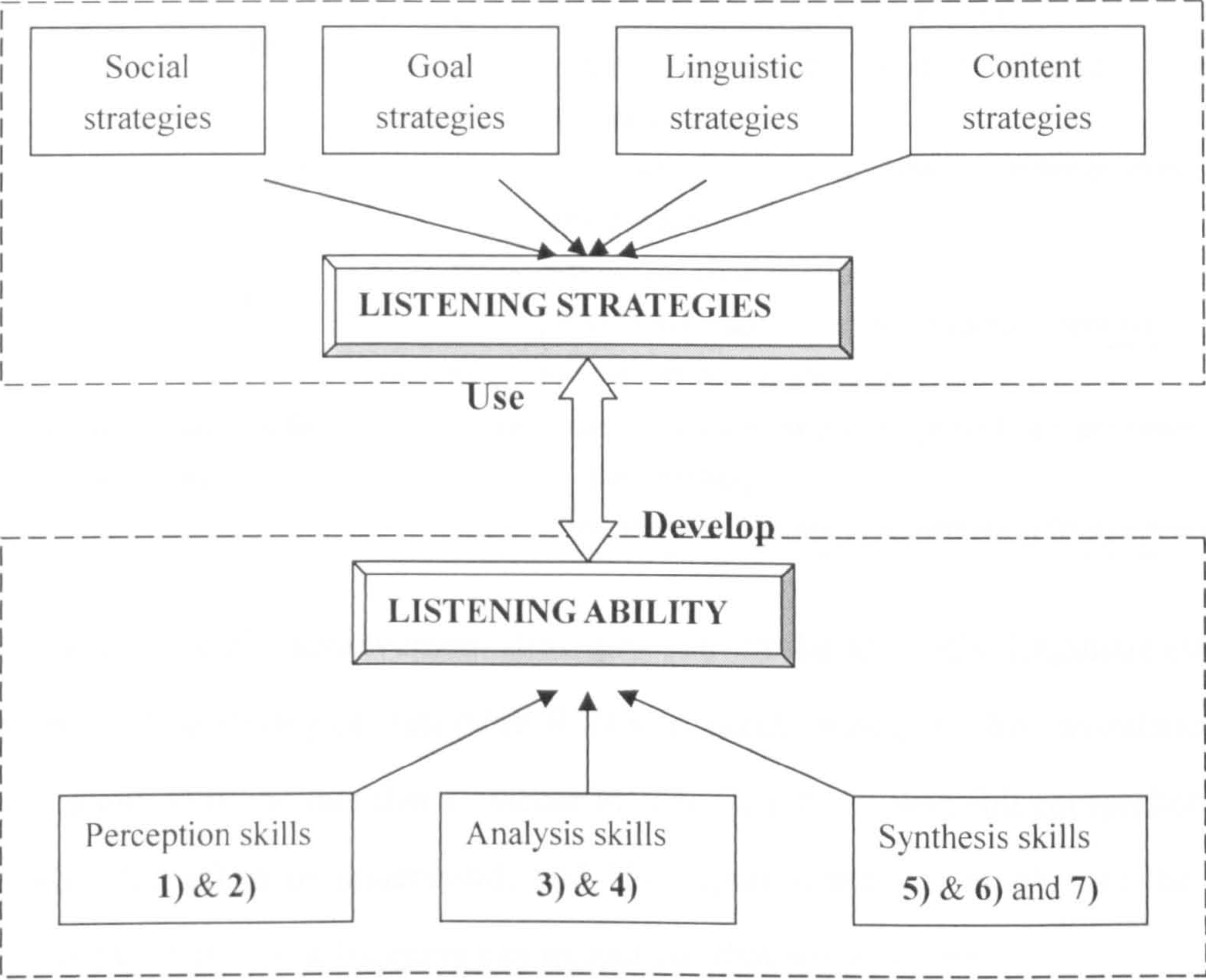


Figure 2.8 Components of successful listening (developed from Rost, 1991)

Figure 2.8 shows that listeners use listening strategies (see Table 2.6) as a means to understand as well as in order to develop listening skills (see Table 2.5), and thereafter coordinate the strategies with the abilities for successful listening.

Thinking of situations in which listeners interact with speakers, Field (2008) lists some further strategies:

Table 2.7 Listening strategies (adapted from Field, 2008: 300-301)

Avoidance strategies	Such as: abandon the message as unreliable; or accept a version of the message that is not very specific.
Achievement strategies	Such as: infer meaning; or focus attention on words bearing sentence stress; or seek cognates in L1.
Repair Strategies	Such as: request for confirmation; or provide summary for speaker to comment on.
Pro-active strategies for listening	Such as: form questions in advance; or associate a word or an image with a main point made by the speaker; or relate the main points to information from elsewhere.

Though Field’s ‘achievement strategies’ are similar to Rost’s ‘linguistic strategies’ and his ‘pro-active strategies’ resemble Rost’s ‘content strategies’, his ‘avoidance strategies’ draw attention to the fact that a listener may settle for less than full comprehension, or just abandon the effort to understand; and his ‘repair strategies’ emphasise the fact that in face-to-face situations, listeners can influence what speakers say.

Hence, listeners use listening strategies to understand input as well as to develop listening skills. The integration of linguistic and non-linguistic skills is the measure for learners to enhance listening comprehension.

2.8.4 Content of an English Listening Comprehension Syllabus

Considering the objectives of an English Listening Comprehension Curriculum discussed in 2.7, as well as the factors influencing Listening Comprehension abilities (see 2.8.1) and the difficulties encountered (see 2.8.2), the content of an English Listening Comprehension Syllabus is designed to improve both the use made by learners of linguistic support and non-linguistic strategies (see 2.8.3). Therefore, the syllabus could suggest teaching objectives, teaching methods and evaluation system.

Teaching objectives

An English Listening Comprehension Syllabus sets requirements in the form of

teaching objectives and the outcomes that are expected. Rost (1990) argues that the focus of listening practice 'should be not on what learners understand but on how learners come to understand language they do not initially understand' (p.227). As regards foreign language Listening Comprehension, the classroom is the most common environment for learning and practising. Students are trained from the very beginning to understand words, and sentences, followed by passages. Later on, they develop the ability to handle English in formal classroom circumstances.

In addition to being able to deal with ideal conditions and easily understand speakers, it can be argued that students should also be familiarised with less than ideal situations. Therefore, the content of a Listening Comprehension Syllabus may also be used to train students to handle the following situations (Underwood, 1989):

Table 2.8 Situations that students need to be trained to handle (Underwood, 1989: 5)

1. listening to live conversations in which one takes no part.
2. listening to announcements (at airports, railway stations, and so on) where the listener is interested almost exclusively in extracting and/or confirming the relevant information whilst more or less ignoring the rest of the utterance.
3. listening to the news or the weather forecast on the radio, where the objective is again to extract clearly stated information, but the purpose for listening may be different.
4. watching the news or the weather forecast on television, where the visual support aids the viewer-listener.
5. listening to the radio for entertainment, where the listener often has very limited knowledge of what is going to be said or who is going to make the utterances.
6. watching television for entertainment, which is comparatively easier than simply listening to the radio.
7. watching a live performance of a play, where the objective is nearly always entertainment.
8. watching a film at the cinema where again the viewer is an outsider, but can see facial expressions and gestures more clearly than in a theatre.
9. listening to recordings of songs where the sound of the music might interfere with the sounds of the words.
10. following a lesson where the listener may need to grasp concepts and distinguish between the main and subsidiary ideas.
11. attending a lecture where the objective is simply to listen and to try to understand the content.
12. listening to a message on the telephone or simply holding a conversation where the listener is unable to see the speaker and may have problems distinguishing the spoken sounds because of interference and distortion.
13. following instructions (given, for example, by a sports coach) with visual support.
14. listening to someone giving a public address where the listener is often as interested in the views and attitude of the speaker as in the actual topic being spoken about.

The above fourteen situations are all relevant to real life. In relation to syllabus design, the task for a course planner or teacher is to determine their respective relevance for the target group of students. Different learners may attach importance to different situations; and even the same learner may have different aims in listening during different periods or in different situations. For example, listening to recordings of songs might not be at all important for a PhD student, but it is also possible that listening to recordings of songs becomes important during a period of time when that PhD student is invited to be an interpreter for a group of musicians. Many of these situations would require high levels

of proficiency. In addition, there are many other situations that learners might encounter in an English-speaking environment such as: understanding instructions from bank staff; or getting a refund from a shop. Hence, an English Listening Comprehension Syllabus may set several levels of situations for students at different levels of proficiency.

Teaching methods

A first realisation in language-course planning, according to Rost (1990), is that ‘procedures’ – what students actually do in the class – are part of the content of a course (p.226). Therefore, an English Listening Comprehension Syllabus should cover teaching-learning procedures (i.e. method). One way of structuring a 90-minute Listening Comprehension classroom session would be as follows:

- Step 1: pre-listening
- Step 2: pre-teaching of new vocabulary
- Step 3: extensive listening based on questions
- Step 4: discussing answers
- Step 5: intensive listening based on questions
- Step 6: discussing answers
- Step 7: further introduction of language or cultural background
- Step 8: extension activities involving extra listening or speaking tasks
- Step 9: review
- Step 10: task for the next 90-minute classroom session

This design covers skill practice and language / cultural input. These steps may be categorised into three phases: *Pre-listening* (Steps 1 and 2) facilitates general comprehension, orients learners to the topic and also elicits students’ knowledge of topic and related vocabulary. This could include introduction of vocabulary, cultural background or some prediction questions. *While-listening* (Steps 3, 4, 5 and 6) challenges and guides learners to handle the information and messages in the passage. Learners may be required to complete some blanks while listening or give short answers to relevant questions. *Follow-up* (Steps 7, 8, 9 and 10) helps learners to reflect on the language of the passage, may offer opportunities for learners to comment on the text / topic or listen to related texts and finally prepares learners for the next session. In this stage, teachers, as

well as students, have choices as what to do, and these will depend on students' needs and the resources available. For different groups of learners or for different purposes, some steps can be omitted and other activities can be added. For example, advanced learners may be asked to preview new vocabulary before the class. Alternatively, they can be given more oral exercises to reinforce what they have listened to.

In addition, there are other considerations when planning Listening Comprehension classroom hours. It is worthwhile considering the possible situations such as: whether it is in the classroom, language lab or listening centre; what equipment is available for use; how many minutes will be allocated to the lesson; what style of Listening Comprehension test students will have and where the test will take place.

To conclude, an English Listening Comprehension Syllabus offers guidance to what competences learners are expected to achieve and guidance for teachers and learners as to what level is expected. In addition, the evaluation of competence should also be included. This will be further discussed in 2.9.5.

2.9 Methods of Implementing an English Listening Comprehension Curriculum

Implementing an English Listening Comprehension Curriculum involves the efforts of all these parties: teachers, learners and supporting aspects such as teaching materials and facilities. In this section, the literature on the teachers' role is first discussed and this is followed by consideration of autonomous learning and the role of the textbook. In addition, the application of computer facilities is becoming increasingly important in modern language learning; therefore, the contribution of CIALL (Computer / Internet Assisted Language Learning) to a curriculum is discussed in detail. In the final part of the section, theories and conceptions of testing are reviewed.

2.9.1 Teachers' role in implementing an innovation

Kennedy (1999b) uses 'changing teachers' to describe the crucial role played by teachers in a changing process' (p.vi). Teachers may change something as implementers of change in the classroom; teachers also change their own behaviour in the classroom (Kennedy, 1999b). That is to say, teachers perhaps need to change teaching strategy; at the same time, teachers also 'change their attitudes and beliefs, and add to their experience and knowledge' (op: cit. vii). If learners are to develop high levels of proficiency, teachers need to 'bring the appropriate knowledge to bear in their classrooms' (Lantolf, 2009:273). Hence, Listening Comprehension teachers are expected to draw on their own experience as listeners and their pedagogic knowledge in order to help learners to develop their listening skills. When an innovation is introduced, what is to be taught, how it is to be taught or the measures to be used, this will require some flexibility on the part of the teacher. Richards (2001) argues that any innovation in classroom practice has to be accommodated within a teacher's pedagogical principles, no matter whether the innovation takes the form of a new textbook or a new curriculum. He adds that teachers 'teach their own personal beliefs and principles, and these help to account for how they interpret their principles, which are a product of their experience, training, and beliefs' (p. 217).

Teachers are much more likely to commit themselves to using an innovation, as suggested by Markee (1997), if 'they (1) have a clear idea of what it is; (2) believe it to be feasible; (3) believe that it addresses a real need, and (4) believe that the costs of innovating in terms of time, energy, and commitment to learning new skills will be out-weighed by the advantages they will accrue as a result of adopting the innovation' (p.178). His suggestion implies that teachers need to be convinced of the positive outcomes of the innovation, and consequently, they would be willing to make contributions.

To ensure effective implementation of an innovation, the following strategies are recommended for teachers:

- Meetings among teachers and administrators need to be organised to ensure maximum participation by all employees and that ‘communication flows in all directions, both vertically and laterally’ (Davidson and Tesh, 1997:187).
- Classroom observation and observations of teachers can provide positive feedback on teaching, as well as enabling teachers to share approaches and teaching strategies (Richards and Lockhart, 1994).
- Collaborative planning, when teachers work together in pairs or groups on course planning, material development and lesson planning make it possible for teachers to share expertise and identify potential problems (Richards, 2001).
- Teacher’s reports encourage sharing successful teaching experiences and classroom innovations (Richards, 2001).

This suggests that an implementation will only be possible if, with some supportive strategies, teachers have an explicit understanding of an innovation and are confident of the positive outcomes of the innovation. Therefore, the conclusion can be drawn that how far the reform can be implemented depends on how teachers respond to and make changes in line with the reform.

For the purpose of successful implementation, teachers could actually be trained to be more professional. Tedick (2009) argues that a large percentage of foreign language teachers pursue language majors and education minors; that is to say, ‘the emphasis is on learning the language and its characteristic content (literature, linguistics, civilisation)’ (p.263). There are ‘principles, processes, skills, behaviours, techniques, strategies, beliefs, and attitudes that impact on teaching-learning and that can be empirically studied and taught’ (Schulz, 2000:516). It is actually not sufficient for teachers to focus on language itself. Lantolf (2009) suggests that teacher education programs need to ‘(re)invest in courses designed to enhance the depth and breadth of explicit knowledge of the target language of their graduates’ (p.270).

In addition to the training suggested by Schulz (2000) and Lantolf (2009), Zimmer-Loew (2008) argues that one of the objectives of teacher training is ‘to encourage and support in-service language teachers through professional development to acquire

new knowledge in their discipline and innovative approaches to learning and teaching and the use of technologies, and to enable them to put this knowledge into practice in their classrooms' (p.627). In short, teacher training should be a continuous progress with opportunities for updating knowledge and technical skills. For example, teachers need to develop technical skills required to cope with the multi-media that can be used in teaching Listening Comprehension.

To sum up, whether an English Listening Comprehension Curriculum innovation is successful or not depends partially on teachers' competence (including technical competence) and involvement. With regard to in-service English teacher training in the Reform in China, detailed discussion will be found in Chapter 3.

2.9.2 Autonomous learning

An innovation cannot succeed simply as a result of teachers' efforts because teachers' input does not mean students' intake. The extent to which teaching achieves its goals also depends on the effort made by learners throughout the process. Specifically for Listening Comprehension, as stated by Rost (1990), for all learners, especially those who experience difficulty in developing listening skills and strategies, self-instruction can play a vital complementary role to classroom instruction (p.234). 'Self-instruction' is here taken to mean 'situations in which a learner, with others or alone, is working without the direct control of the teacher' (Dickinson, 1987:5). Since Listening Comprehension requires self-motivated practice, autonomous learning has an important role in language learning. As indicated in 2.7.2, autonomous learning may have a dual role in a Listening Comprehension Curriculum: as one of the general aims of the curriculum, and one of the methods of successfully implementing a curriculum reform. In this section, the focus is on factors influencing learner autonomy and how autonomous learning can be facilitated.

Factors influencing learner attitudes towards autonomy

As mentioned in 2.7.2, in an extreme form autonomous learning requires learners to control all aspects of learning, which means an active attitude while learning. Various

factors have been suggested as influencing the development of learner attitudes towards autonomy in learning. Wenden (1991) sums up seven factors, as follows:

1. In the socialisation process, when learners are young they get used to the belief that to be a learner is to be dependent, so when they enter into an educational activity as adults they expect to be treated like children. The expectation, based on early socialisation, is so strong that they often put pressure on their teachers to behave towards them in this way.
2. Many needs and concerns compete for the learners' time and energy, and so learning a second language might not be given the top priority. Even if a university student agrees that learning the language is important, their goal might just be to obtain a degree; therefore, there may be a conflict with other demands.
3. Learners may resist taking on more responsibility for their language learning or display an apparent lack of self-confidence in their ability to do so.
4. Some learners may not be able to believe in their intellectual potential; therefore, they lack willingness and self-confidence when taking on responsibility for their learning.
5. After some failure in learning some learners may believe themselves incapable of learning without a teacher.
6. Low self-esteem, which is the evaluation a person makes and holds with regard to themselves, may contribute to the formation of learners' negative attitudes towards their capability to learn autonomously.
7. A negative self-image, which is the negative outcome of the evaluations that persons make with regard to themselves, can not only influence their language learning outcomes but also shape their attitudes towards learning autonomously.

Wenden (1991: 55-58)

That is to say, many young learners have been used to being dependent so they are not at all confident when they are pushed to learn without teachers. Moreover, foreign language learning is not an important aspect in many students' study; therefore, they may not be motivated to learn autonomously. In addition to these factors relevant to attitudes, personal characteristics such as self-esteem and self-image are also factors influencing learners' autonomous learning.

Wenden (1991) focuses mainly on learners themselves, but Healey (1999) argues that learner autonomy can be influenced not only by learner issues but also content issues. Three conditions of content issues are taken into consideration: firstly, 'the path to the goal is relatively unambiguous' (Healey, 1999:394); secondly, 'what is to be learned can be explained clearly' (op.cit:395); and finally, 'appropriate resources exist for self-directed language learning' (op.cit:396). This suggests that learner autonomy is not

determined simply by learners themselves, but also external factors.

Cultural conditioning may also affect learners' attitudes to autonomy. According to Palfreyman (2003),

'A common way of interpreting 'culture' is to refer to national / ethnic cultures such as "Chinese culture" or "Western culture". Culture is important for language learning and education because these take place within a culture (or cultures)...correlations between individual learners' national / ethnic cultural background and individual variables which are related to autonomy – such as learning strategies, learning styles, beliefs about learning and motivation.'

(Palfreyman, 2003: 5,8)

That is to say, the learner's attitude to autonomy tends to be associated with whether it is valued in his / her society. Bedell and Oxford (1996) suggest that learners from different cultural backgrounds may adopt different learning styles and strategies. For example, compensation strategies such as guessing in listening are used more by students in Mainland China than by students in Egypt or Puerto Rico. As another example of a cultural dimension to autonomy, Littlewood (1996) states that the emphasis on effort and the collective (rather than on talent and individual gain) in 'Confucian' cultures, as discussed in 2.2, may support learner autonomy in language learning. Chinese students' autonomous learning will be further discussed in Chapter 3.

Support for autonomous learning

A number of approaches to the support of autonomous learning have been suggested. Nunan, Lai and Keobke (1999) argue that autonomy is enhanced when learners are encouraged in six aspects: learning process, learning content, learning tasks, productive use of the target language, learning strategies and self-assessment. Wolff's (2003) research has some overlaps with Nunan, Lai and Keobke (1999). He presents six concepts characterising supportive institutional learning environments: learning content, learning objectives, learning context, social forms of learning, learning strategies and evaluation.

- Geography and history provide rich learning content for the foreign language classroom, content which is potentially more motivating than some purposefully designed textbooks.
- Learners should define their own learning objectives.

- In classrooms oriented towards learner autonomy, the learning context is created collaboratively by students and teachers.
- In learner autonomy the dominant social form of learning is group work. In an autonomous classroom, occasions for group work are much more numerous than in a traditional classroom.
- Only learners who have learned to work with specific learning techniques and study skills will be able to become more independent in their learning.
- Self-assessment is considered as very important in learner autonomy.

(Wolff, 2003: 219-220)

If we apply these aspects to supportive learning environments for Listening Comprehension, then rich learning content such as geographical and historical background adds interest; learning objectives for listening are defined by learners whilst learning context is created by students and teachers; there is increased use of group work and learners should be encouraged to assess their own performance.

As regards software support, technology supports a listener's control over the content and the structure of learning, including the time, the pace, the path to the goal, and the measurement of success (Healey, 1999; and Krashen, 1982). Beatty (2003) expresses the notion that autonomy is fostered by CALL because 'computers are available beyond the time and space confines of the classroom' (p.10). Application of computer facilities is further discussed in the following section as well as in section 2.9.4.

Furthermore, Nunan, Lai and Keobke (1999) argue that some degree of autonomy can be fostered by 'systematically incorporating strategy training into the learning process' (p.70). They express the belief that 'Learners need to be systematically educated in the skills and knowledge they will need in order to make informed choices about what they want to learn and how they want to learn' (ibid).

To sum up, on one hand, factors such as learners and content influence autonomy in language learning, and on the other hand, although the extent of autonomy is influenced by factors ranging from personality to the cultural context, some degree of autonomy can be strengthened by systematic training. Hence, while autonomous learning may be able to facilitate the implementation of a Listening Comprehension Curriculum, the capacity for autonomous learning may itself first need to be developed.

2.9.3 *The role and design of textbooks*

Teaching materials generally serve as the basis for much of the language input learners receive and the language practice that occurs in classrooms. Richards (2001:251) categorises teaching materials into three groups: *printed materials* such as books and workbooks; *non-print materials* such as cassettes or audio materials, videos, and computer-based materials; and materials that comprise *both print and non-print sources* such as self-access materials and materials on the Internet. Additionally, teachers make use of materials not primarily designed for teaching use, such as magazines, newspapers, and TV materials. In this section, the term ‘textbooks’ is used to refer not only to printed materials, but also refers to textbook packages that the publisher supplies with supplementary materials.

The role of textbooks

Textbooks are a significant aspect of a language curriculum. While learning and practising English Listening Comprehension, teachers and learners take advantage of teaching materials to improve skills and to obtain information. For teachers, textbooks are used as a primary teaching resource or to supplement the teacher’s instruction. For learners, textbooks are regarded as the major source of contact with the language besides the teacher. As stated by Richards (2001), without textbooks, ‘a programme may have no central core and learners may not receive a syllabus that has been systematically planned and developed’ (p.254). Cunningsworth (1995) summarises the role of textbooks in language teaching as:

- A resource for presentation materials (spoken and written)
- A source of activities for learner practice and communicative interaction
- A reference source for learners on grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and so on
- A source of stimulation and ideas for classroom activities
- A syllabus (where they reflect learning objectives that have already been determined)
- A support for less experienced teachers who have yet to gain in confidence

(Cunningsworth, 1995: 7)

Cunningsworth (1995) looks at textbooks mainly as a source for teachers' reference and for students' input. Comparatively, Richards (2001) focuses more on the aims and purposes of textbooks. He sums up some advantages of textbooks as follows:

- textbooks *ensure* standardised instruction for students in different classes so that they can be tested and levelled in the same way;
- well-developed textbooks (i.e. those have been tried and tested) *maintain* exposure of high quality for students so that they can improve appropriately;
- textbooks *provide* a variety of learning resources (e.g., workbooks, CDs and cassettes, videos, CD-ROMs, and comprehensive teaching guides);
- textbooks *save* teachers' time, enabling them to devote time to teaching rather than spending time on material production;
- textbooks *support* teachers whose first language is not English and who may not be able to generate accurate language input on their own;
- textbooks *train* teachers who have limited teaching experience;
- textbooks also *appeal* to learners and teachers with high standards of design and production.

(Richards, 2001)

Both Cunningsworth (1995) and Richards (2001) agree that textbooks offer support to less experienced teachers, whereas more experienced and confident teachers do not necessarily rely on textbooks. However, even if some more experienced and confident teachers analyse the learners' demands and selectively use various materials and resources, textbooks could still be a useful reference.

Furthermore, the increased use in textbook packages of authentic materials makes textbooks more important in the sense that authentic materials prepare students for real-life listening, and enable learners to 'develop useful transferable skills and present possibilities for cross-curricular work' (Slater and Varney-Burch, 2001:37). In relation to listening materials, Underwood (1989) distinguishes non-authentic from authentic speech on the basis of a number of features.

'Non-authentic speech might exhibit unnatural rhythm; unnatural intonation; over-clear enunciation; little overlap between speakers; slow (and perhaps monotonous) delivery; structured language which was meant to be read silently rather than spoken aloud; complete sentences as utterances; no background noise; artificial stops and starts; and densely packed information.'

(Underwood, 1989: 99)

This description is an implicit argument for the inclusion in Listening Comprehension textbooks of authentic practice.

Evaluation of textbooks in a curriculum

The evaluation of textbooks needs to consider learners, teachers, and the learning situation. A book might suit one group of listeners because it meets the needs of that situation. The same book might be quite unsuitable for another group of listeners because the content is limited or the level is inappropriate, for instance.

Researchers (e.g. Cunningsworth, 1995; Nunan, 1988; and Rowntree, 1997) sum up criteria for evaluating textbooks. Textbooks are expected to:

1. act as a support for learning: correspond to learners' needs and match the learning objectives.
2. facilitate learners' learning processes: reflect the learners' uses of the language and encourage them to practise.
3. arouse the learners' interest.
4. synthesise the language event into a context to facilitate comprehension.
5. make the language event as cognitive tasks for the learner. (Presumably, identifying a named item by pointing to it is cognitively less demanding than describing it.)
6. use the background knowledge of the language user to assist in comprehension.
7. consider the amount of assistance provided to the language learner.
8. take the processing difficulty of the language into account.
9. balance the degree of stress experienced by the learner in taking part in a language event. (Presumably, conveying a message to a friend is less stressful than making a speech in front of 500 people.)

(developed from Cunningsworth, 1995; Nunan, 1988 and Rowntree, 1997)

These criteria can be helpful in determining whether textbooks are suitable for a certain group of learners. Sometimes, though, textbooks are considered unsuitable because they have been used in a way which was not intended by the authors. Hence, Nunan (1995) suggests that before adapting materials which are from reputable authors and publishers and have been carefully written and extensively trialled, it is advisable to 'teach such materials at least once in the ways suggested by the author' (p.219).

McGrath (2002) suggests evaluation in terms of both the micro and macro context. Within the scope of the micro context, three factors are considered: characteristics of the

learner group; teachers who will use the materials; and the programme and the institution. Within the macro context, cultural, religious, economic and political issues can all have an influence. Table 2.9 illustrates relevant factors in both the micro and macro contexts.

Table 2.9 Micro and Macro contexts for evaluating teaching materials (adapted from McGrath 2002: 19-21)

Micro context			Macro context
Learner factors	Teacher factors	Institutions and specific programme	Social, cultural, religious, economic and political issues
Proficiency level in the target language (and homogeneity within the learner group)	Language competence (as target language users and analysts but also as speakers of the learners' first language)	Level within the educational system	Aims of education
Previous language-learning experience (of the target language and any other languages)	Methodological competence and awareness (including ability to adapt course books, and prepare supplementary material)	Role of the target language	Aims of language education
Reasons for studying the target language (if applicable)	Experience of teaching the kind of learner for whom the materials are being selected	Time available for the study of the target language	Cultural and religious considerations
Socio-cultural background	Attitude to teaching and to learners	Timetable	
Attitudes to learning (including attitudes to the language, its speakers, the teacher, the institution)	Beliefs about teaching - learning, preferred teaching style, preferred method)	Physical environment (e.g. classroom size, flexibility of seating, acoustics)	
Academic and educational level		Additional resources available (e.g. cassette recorder, video recorder, overhead projector, photocopier, computers)	
General expectations (of the course / textbook / teacher / own role)		Decision-making mechanisms and freedom given to teachers	
Language-learning aptitude		Aims of the programme	
Preferred learning styles			

Such criteria could be used to choose textbooks for learners of particular proficiency

levels and with particular social and cultural backgrounds. For example one criterion might be whether a textbook contains texts on simple topics which the listener is likely to be familiar with: family, daily schedule, work, hobbies, vacations, leisure activities and so on (Buck, 2001).

It is also important to consider the difficulty levels of listening texts. Rixon (1989) argues that challenging texts allow learners to make more discoveries, whilst easy texts can provide direct information and help to 'cheer up a demoralised class' (p.56). She also comments on the relationship between difficulty levels and learning motivation:

- Immediately comprehensible texts lead to instant encouragement.
- Quite easy → challenging texts with well-chosen exercises lead learners to a sense of success.
- Too difficult texts discourage and provoke panic.

Other factors than the above criteria such as the speed and the clearness of speech are also relevant. Therefore, for students of different proficiency levels, these criteria and factors need to be considered in determining whether the texts are suitable for extensive listening or intensive listening, or whether it is worthwhile amending the texts to meet the requirements. The following part discusses amendment to textbooks.

Amendment to textbooks

Even though there are all kinds of well-edited textbooks for all kinds of teachers and learners, the variety within any learning group means that the teacher cannot simply teach the textbook. McGrath (2002) maintains that when a lesson is to be based on a course book, four evaluative processes are subsequently involved:

- selection, i.e. use of the activity / exercises in its original form;
- rejection, i.e. non-use;
- addition based on the existing material; and supplements;

- changes, i.e. explain / illustrate.

(McGrath, 2002: 59)

This can be regarded as a process in which textbooks are continuously evaluated, selected, amended and re-evaluated. Richards (2001:260) also suggests that textbooks can be adapted by modifying content, adding or deleting content, reorganising content, addressing omissions, modifying tasks, and extending tasks. It is considered as an essential skill for teachers to develop the available textbooks with their own practical experience. It enables good teachers to create effective lessons out of the resources they make use of.

Therefore, it is important to choose the proper textbooks for learners of different levels with different backgrounds and for different purposes. It also implies that the level of amendments will obviously be reduced if an appropriate choice of textbook is made in the first place; however, teachers' competence also needs to be considered in order to make the best use of textbooks.

Many researchers have studied textbooks in general, though the listening component of textbooks is something that most published evaluation criteria have not addressed. Moreover, they focus on general skills instead of particular skills such as listening comprehension.

2.9.4 CIAEL (Computer / Internet Assisted English Learning) in a curriculum

As discussed in 2.7, computers and the Internet are a means to achieve the objectives of a Listening Comprehension Curriculum. The term CIAEL (Computer / Internet Assisted English Learning) is particularly used in the Chinese context in the sense that it focuses on English learning, but theories on CALL (Computer-Assisted Language Learning) are still applicable.

Some acceptable reasons for making use of CALL can be seen in Bishop's (1999) conclusion:

- Classes are too large for teachers to monitor their students' individual progress.
- Students in the same class are of varying levels and therefore need more individual attention.
- The students need CALL to prepare for their real-life business environment.
- The students need more one-on-one practice than they can get in the classroom.
- To get students to do collaborative projects as a means of enhancing communicative skills.
- You want enriched, alternative means of communication.
- You want to provide practice in a skill or an introduction to concepts that cannot be offered otherwise.

(Bishop, 1999: 273)

CALL can be delivered by various methods: individual computers at home or in the classroom, classroom sets of computers, language labs into which computer functions have been incorporated, online instruction through the WWW and distance and networked learning through the use of email.

The role of computers in language learning

The strength of computers lies in the opportunities they offer for unchanging language instruction at any time of day. Beatty (2003) holds that CALL materials, regardless of their design, allow for endless revisiting that can help learners review those parts for which they need more practice, i.e. it is the learner who decides what to focus on. These days, computers can also offer access to the Internet. As McGrath (2002) points out, 'the Internet can be used as a source of material for teacher-directed learning; it can be used as a medium for self-directed learning; it can be used for Web-based teaching; problems and issues in teaching can be dealt with via the Web' (p.125). Therefore, computer facilities and the Internet can be seen as convenient and rich resources for both teaching and learning.

In Levy's (1997) survey, the reasons for thinking CALL a valuable resource are summed up as follows (listed in order of most important to least important):

- General characteristics of computers make them suitable
- Motivating or enjoyable
- Individualisation
- Autonomous learning, self-access, or self-study use

- Further practice, or more time on tasks
- Methods/activities/tasks unique to computers
- Frees teacher
- Links to outside the classroom
- Diversifies teaching

(Levy, 1997)

From this description, CALL appears to be ideal for individualised and self-motivated study. Jung and Vanderplank (1994) also argue that one of the most important benefits computers bring to language learning is the potential for greater learner autonomy.

As far as the development of listening comprehension skills are concerned, computers have been recognised to have many advantages over the audio recorder. Hanson-Smith (1999) argues as follows:

‘Listening to voices in a visual context can create stronger memory links than voices alone; Instant, accurate playback should enable students to hear specific parts of a segment without a tedious search through an audiotape.’

(Hanson-Smith, 1999: 190)

Thornton and Dudley (1996) confirm the latter point; they found that students spent considerably less time on non-learning tasks when using computer-based materials, such as rewinding. Therefore, ease of replay and the student’s control over replay make the CALL environment a very convenient source of listening input.

Computers in the classroom

Sivert and Egbert (1999) describe a traditional computer lab environment:

‘Traditionally, getting a class to use computers has meant going to the computer lab. There, each learner walks into a cold, sterile environment of 20-30 computers, each set on a desk designed to hold nothing more than the central processing unit (CPU), monitor, and keyboard and placed in rows, all facing the front of the room. As class begins, learners sit in their seats, stash their books next to their chairs, crouch in front of their computer screens, and work individually through drill-and-practice grammar software.’

(Sivert and Egbert, 1999: 41)

This has already changed in many computer rooms. For example, modern updated

computer facilities are employed and the Internet is connected. The 'Virtual Language Centre' is also set up as a web site dedicated to providing an integrated range of language learning and teaching materials, which can be accessed for self-access study or by teachers for use in their classes. Students do not just work on computers by themselves; instead, they are encouraged to discuss and communicate with classmates via networks. They log into a group and enter the electronic discussion by typing their comments. It is very important that learners 'have some time for reflection while producing the target language' and 'at their own pace' (Chapelle, 2001:60).

Computers in the classroom can also be used for the following purposes: to complete language learning courseware; as reference materials such as a 'multi-lingual talking picture dictionary; to complete assessment and testing; to simulate a real language environment; to support learning as a tool, and so on' (Slater and Varney-Burch, 2001:20-24).

As regards a CALL centre, Bishop (1999) argues that the main purpose is to support and advance the instructional objectives of a language teaching and learning curriculum' (p.274). Hence, the software used in classroom teaching as well as in the CALL centre must be closely related to what is being taught and have a direct, positive impact on students' learning so that students using the software on their own can go directly to the lessons assigned and not waste time trying to find an appropriate place to begin. If students are allowed to use the computers whenever they need access, then it is necessary to arrange the continued presence of a teacher, member of the technical staff, an aide, or a peer tutor to answer questions or help solve technical problems.

Particularly as far as the application of computers in Listening Comprehension is concerned, learning is learner-centred in the sense that learners choose what to do and how much time to spend on this. For example, learners can select audio or video clips to serve as practice aids. They can also choose to listen to materials with or without transcripts. They can control the selection of activities at their own pace, or repeat as they prefer. Computers can provide many tasks for listening activity. As Slater and Varney-Burch (2001) conclude, the multi-media formats of some exercises are 'presented in inventive and interactive formats, which help to maintain the learners' interest, recycle

language and reinforce learning' (p.26).

With computer facilities, learning and practising language can be realised not only with materials designed for learning, but also materials from an authentic environment. For example, watching full-length target-language movies is also one of the applications of computers in language learning. Watching videos was one of the most popular activities in Gardner and Miller's (1997) survey of Hong Kong university students. Little, Devitt and Singleton (1989) suggest three reasons why authentic movies are valuable for language learning:

1. There is a high level of motivation among learners;
2. Movies provide opportunities for exposure to a wider range of language, in terms of grammar, vocabulary, function, register, accent, gender, age, and so on, than other video programmes;
3. Full-length movies provide a greater quantity of language in which to immerse users than shorter videos.

From this we might assume that watching movies is perfect for exposure to the language, and there are actually some successful programmes. For example, Gardner (1999) reports that learners who made full use of the features of a bilingual programme conducted in 1996 tended to score higher than their classmates on the comprehension questions included in the programme. However in another experiment, attempts to enhance language learning potential by using movies have met with 'resistance or at least a lack of interest' (Gardner, 1999:96). Hence, he concludes that movies might be helpful depending on the factors of learners, the role of teachers and learning strategies. Only when learners purposefully watch movies to learn the language and at the same time use appropriate strategies or are supported by teachers, can the balance between enjoyment and usefulness be guaranteed.

Problems while using computers in teaching and learning

Although computers are acknowledged to have the above-mentioned advantages,

there exist concerns that they can be overused or misused.

First of all, as stated by Beatty (2003), a weakness of some computer-based materials is the lack of clearly determined scope and sequence. Conklin (1987) points out that:

‘Along with the power to organise information much more complexly comes the problem of having to know 1. where you are in the network and 2. how to get to some other place that you know (or think) exists in the network. Hypertext offers more degrees of freedom, more dimensions in which one can move, and hence greater potential for the user to become lost or disoriented.’

(Conklin, 1987: 38-41)

Therefore, the convenience of the network to explore a variety of the websites is also an intrinsic disadvantage because it may distract the learners. To work properly with such resources and materials, learners may need more guidance.

Secondly, although a computer programme might assume some of a teacher’s functions, there are clearly limits to the ways in which software is able to take the place of a teacher (Beatty, 2003). For example, Tripp (1993) refers to teachers’ decisions when handling errors in the classroom. Teachers do a far better job than computers in the sense that they may analyse the situation as well as the personality of the learners, they may also consider the objectives of the relevant error correction.

Thirdly, a computer programme can be entertaining and as a result keep students quiet and relatively content but they may not be learning. Willis (1983) describes an individual ‘sitting in the classroom glassy-eyed, neither actively enjoying the programme nor summoning the energy to switch it off’ (p.17).

Fourthly, computers can be overused and misused if they are doing a job which could be as well or even better done with the help of a simpler aid (Willis, 1983). For example, static diagrammatic material might be presented better with an overhead projector because an overhead projector offers a bigger and clearer picture and teachers can easily point out relevant features of the information displayed.

Fifthly, Kenner (1999) points out that hardware and software can be a barrier to language learning. For example, the more time students spend on getting the software to run, the less time they will spend on the language task. He argues that ‘If students must struggle in the language learning classroom, it should be with the language itself and not

the tools' (p.373).

Lastly, Beatty (2003) points out that the environment of traditional schools is not usually or ideally suited to the delivery of CALL or other types of computer-aided learning in a collaborative context because each learner and each computer are usually isolated by individual carrels. The problem faced in most classrooms is 'how to isolate, or provide privacy for an individual student while allowing a group of students the collaborative opportunity to excitedly discuss and negotiate' (p.154).

To conclude, problems of using computer facilities and the Internet come from learners, the layout of the classrooms, the hardware as well as software. The benefits of these facilities, therefore, inevitably coexist with some intrinsic problems.

2.9.5 Testing in language learning

Testing, as a form of assessment to obtain feedback from participants on what they have learned, is a critical component of language learning because it influences the future of learners, the professional evaluation of instructors, and the direction of curriculum design.

Chao (1999) presents some reasons as to why assessment is necessary. On the one hand, assessment - if valid and reliable - can tell how well teachers teach and how well students learn. Moreover learners' families also know the students' achievement by looking at the test results. Furthermore, tests also help learners to:

'move ahead and improve; to gain familiarity with the content being taught; to become aware of their own position in the learning process; to fine-tune their understanding of the target language and culture; and to set goals for the next stage of learning.'

(Chao, 1999: 244)

The information shows the learners' strengths, weaknesses, and progress (or lack of progress) so that appropriate instructional support or adjustment of teaching can be provided.

Testing language competence

As regards the testing of communicative competence, it is worthwhile considering the degree to which tests are assessments of performance or assessments of competence. Morrow (1981) considers the role of language testing as to:

‘provide proof of the candidate’s ability to actually use the language, to translate the competence (or lack of it) which he or she is demonstrating into actual performance *in ordinary situations*, that is to say, actually using the language to read, write, speak and listen in ways and contexts which correspond to real life.’

(Morrow, 1981: 16)

That is to say, language testing assesses or should assess learners’ all-round ability to deal with situations in real life. If the focus of teaching and learning the language has changed to become the improvement of students’ communicative abilities, the focus of testing should change accordingly. Carroll (1981) expresses his understanding of the changing focus:

‘The distinction between usage and use is of great importance for teaching and testing. It implies that a test cannot be based on a selection of items chosen on linguistic grounds alone, and that to devise an effective test, it is necessary to specify how a testee requires correctness but in communicative effectiveness...Changing the emphasis from usage to use means also changing ideas concerning the specificity of tests. From the usage point of view, a language can be seen as a unified entity with fixed grammatical patterns and a core of commonly-used lexical items. Equipped with a mastery of these language patterns, it is hoped the user will learn to cope with the situations he finds himself in. Therefore, a single test of the learner’s language proficiency based on formal usage should prove an adequate indication of ability to cope with real situations. But from the point of view of the role of language in communication, such a view is greatly over-simplified. Different patterns of communication will entail different configurations of language skill mastery, and therefore a different course or test content. From the use point of view, language loses its appearance of unity and must be taught and tested according to the specific needs of the learner.’

(Carroll, 1981: 7-8)

Carroll’s views are quoted in such length for three important reasons. Firstly, the quotation clarifies the important difference between usage and use, and accordingly, the difference testing should emphasise. Secondly, the assessment procedure will be

underpinned by views on the nature of language and language learning. Thirdly, tests should aim to test what has been taught.

The test scores, as stated by Hambleton (1983), could be used to ‘judge the success of an instructional programme. They are also helpful to determine areas of the curriculum which need change’ (Hambleton, 1983:34). That is to say, testing is one tool in curriculum evaluation.

Testing Listening Comprehension

According to Buck (2001), the Listening Comprehension process includes numerous interacting strategies and information sources. That is to say, the comprehension process is dependent on everything the listeners have in their minds and the message is ‘interpreted and modified when incoming stimuli interact with previous input and other existing contextual information’ (Ockey, 2007:519). Buck (2001) introduces three approaches to assessing listening. Table 2.10 is developed from his research:

Table 2.10 Three approaches to assessing listening (developed from Buck, 2001)

	The discrete-point approach	The integrative approach	The communicative approach
The most common tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✧ Phonemic discrimination tasks✧ Paraphrase recognition✧ Response evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✧ Noise tests✧ Listening cloze✧ Dictation✧ Sentence-repetition tasks✧ Statement evaluation✧ Translation	Authentic texts and authentic tasks
Literature support	Lado (1961:2008): the basic testing technique is orally presenting an utterance to the students in the target language and checking to see if the students understand the complete utterance or crucial parts of it.	Oller (1979:37): whereas discrete items attempt to test knowledge of language one bit at a time, integrative tests attempt to assess a learner’s capacity to use many bits all at the same time.	Carroll (1980:7): the use of language is the objective, and the mastery of the formal patterns, or usage, of that language is a means to achieving that objective.

Table 2.10 displays three approaches to assessing listening with different focuses. The

discrete-point approach tends to check listeners' understanding of an utterance with an emphasis on linguistic elements. The integrative approach requires higher level proficiency in the sense that it tests listeners' ability to understand the literal and semantic meaning. Buck (2001) argues that listening can be understood as 'processing texts in real time, to understand the literal, semantic meaning. There is very little attempt to relate the linguistic information to a wider context, or to ask the test-taker to process inferential meanings' (p.82). The communicative approach is considered as the most demanding test because test-takers are required to achieve the ability to communicate in target language. Buck (2001) makes the comment that 'on a practical level, a communicative test is one that better simulates the characteristics of target-language use in the real world. However, strictly speaking, there is no such thing as a communicative test. In reality, we should not be looking at the test, but at the interaction between the test tasks and the test-taker (p.92).

Problems of testing

Rost (1990) argues that 'the testing process itself – in design, administration, scoring, feedback – may not reflect the needs of learners and teachers for assessment of how well learning goals are being reached' (p.176). Black (1986) comments on the major purposes of prevailing testing: most testing and assessment programmes now in place in formal education are for purposes of reporting on learner status (e.g. by providing norm-referenced information on learner ranking) rather than for purposes of learning (e.g. by providing criterion-referenced feedback to students in order to help them formulate new learning objectives in achievable steps).

There are some problems in the purpose of testing. Testing is actually just sampling the taught syllabus. As criticised by Ross (2008), 'the assessment of language learned in school can be in sharp contrast with language learned through naturalistic exposure' (p.8). In the context of China, Cheng (2008) describes the College English Test (CET) as being designed to provide a dual function criterion-related and norm-referenced standard for gauging English language educational outcomes. She points out that negative washback occurs mainly because the CET pass rates are used 'to rank institutions and are used for

other purposes unrelated to the college English curriculum' (p.15). Japan has also suffered from movements to modernise language teaching and testing, as Ross (2008) notes: efforts to reduce the detrimental effects of competition in the early 1990s led to an increase in parents investing in after-school coaching for their children. The above examples indicate that language testing goes far beyond the original issues of reliability or validity while assessing learners' language, but have complex social, economic, and philosophical ramifications.

Problems also exist in the forms of testing. Cloze, multiple-choice, true-false, and fill-in-blank tests are very popular evaluation tools to test grammar points and specific vocabulary items, to check reading and Listening Comprehension, and to evaluate other discrete aspects of language. Chao (1999) criticises some traditional methods of assessment such as multiple-choice or fill-in-blank tests, which often encourage 'test-wiseness': 'Students can guess the correct answer without rigorous study and thinking, and without real meaning and understanding if they just figure out the logic of the test questions or what is in the teacher's mind' (p.253).

To sum up, testing can mean assessment of learning, but at the same time it can also be assessment for learning. That is to say, properly designed testing can be informative and offer guidance for teaching-learning.

2.10 Summary

The focus of this chapter has been on the literature relating to curriculum innovation and specifically English Listening Comprehension curricula.

The objectives of a new curriculum are the expected outcomes after implementation. The most important objective of an English Listening Comprehension Curriculum is to enhance learners' listening skills and to realise this purpose, learner autonomy and the application of computer facilities are considered to be useful means. Whether an innovation is successful or not largely depends on the implementation; from these perspectives, the most important section of this chapter is how to implement effectively an innovative curriculum. This has been demonstrated by showing the interrelationships between the relevant components in the process: teachers, students, teaching materials, teaching facilities (computers and the Internet), and testing. How to evaluate an innovation has been explored in detail because evaluation not only feeds into dynamic implementation, but can also be a very crucial reference for future innovations.

As far as Listening Comprehension is concerned, the chapter has dealt with the objectives and the content of an English Listening Comprehension curriculum. It has also outlined how a curriculum can be implemented with efforts from both teachers and learners as well as with supporting teaching materials and facilities. Much of the literature reviewed here originates in the West. In order to provide a more detailed understanding of the Chinese background to my research, the next chapter reviews the literature on English learning in China, and in particular, the English Listening Comprehension Curriculum, as well as the National English Teaching Reform itself.

CHAPTER 3 ENGLISH CURRICULUM INNOVATION AT UNIVERSITY LEVEL IN CHINA

3.1 The National English Teaching Reform in China

Chapter 1 described the English teaching-learning system in China and Chapter 2 provided a broad review of both curriculum innovation and English Listening Comprehension. This chapter explains the background to and nature of the National Reform of College English teaching which attempted to deal with the problems in teaching and learning English indicated in Chapter 1.

As White (1988) notes (see 2.2), there are several stages in the dissemination and adoption of an innovation. The implementation of the Reform in China also experienced a process from initial introduction of ‘College English Curriculum Teaching Requirements’ in 2004 to full implementation all over the country from 2005 (see 1.2.2). This chapter provides further detail on the Reform, and also discusses the efforts made to implement the Reform and the research carried out thus far to investigate the effectiveness of these efforts. Due to the fact that much of this research has been conducted in China by Chinese researchers, most research reports have been written in Chinese. Where the source of quotations was originally in Chinese, this is indicated in the text; translations and interpretations are my own.

3.1.1 Background to the National English Teaching Reform in China

As Cortazzi (1996) concludes, the development of English language teaching in China has gone through a number of stages since the People’s Republic was established in 1949. In the first stage from the early 1950s, ‘the *grammar-translation* method’ was established via Russian textbooks during the period when the (then) Soviet Union was giving China economic and technical aid (Cortazzi, 1996:64). Subsequently, from the late 1950s to the

1970s, ‘the *audiolingual* method (or at least the drills associated with this)’ (ibid) became influential when Chinese textbook writers sought to develop materials and methods suited to Chinese learners as well as Chinese conditions. In the third stage, from the late 1970s, the so-called ‘*communicative* approach which emphasised the communicative abilities’ (ibid) was introduced because English was seen as an important element in reform and opening up to the outside world. As this implies, English language learning was previously based on grammar, and gradually, more emphasis was placed on listening and speaking. The current stage is termed ‘*autonomous learning*’ (Hu, 2007; and Hui, 2003) to reflect a new emphasis on student-centred learning. The College English Curriculum Teaching requirements instruct teachers that with the support of modern IT, especially the Internet, English teaching should be personalised and autonomous learning facilitated. Hu (2007) argues that despite these apparent methodological shifts, the traditional grammar-translation method is still tremendously influential. Both teachers and students are used to the traditional way of learning English, and find it less demanding to stick to what they know.

Su (2004) offers one example of a College English class; the main stages in the lesson were recorded as follows:

Table 3.1 An example of a College English class (developed from Su, 2004):

I. Pre-reading activities	Teacher analyses the title to guide learners to obtain a general idea of the whole text.
	Teacher introduces the author.
	Teacher analyses the writing style.
II. Grammar analysis and content analysis	Students read paragraph by paragraph and teacher corrects their pronunciation.
	Teacher explains words, phrases and sentences. Students work out paraphrase.
	Teacher asks questions on texts and grammatical points.
	Teacher and students discuss the content of the text – ‘Sleeplessness: the reasons for sleeplessness, own experiences and advice to solve this problem’.
III. Writing style analysis	Teacher guides students to understand the text, the connotations and the style characteristics.

The above table shows that the teacher provided a great deal of input in the form of

explanation and analysis. There was some relevant practice but the author did not indicate the time spent on this. In fact, he comments on this classroom record: 'The teacher clearly talked much more than students and students passively did exercises or practice. There is no evidence that the teacher gave advice on learning strategies or learners' active participation' (Su, 2004:197, original in Chinese). It seems that students did not actually participate actively even though there appeared to be discussion or question time.

The Director of the Higher Education Department of the Ministry of Education commented in 2003 that College English education had produced millions of graduates with a reasonable level of English. Evidence of this is that Chinese students are capable of obtaining high marks in various tests such as TOEFL (The Summary of National English Teaching Reform Meeting, MOE, 2003); nevertheless, Chinese graduates' ability to use English productively is comparatively weak. Therefore, College English education is criticised for having focused too much on grammar whilst ignoring listening and speaking ability (Ji and He 2004; and Zhou, 2005). Some students might be able to remember the whole dictionary, but when they are abroad, or when it is their turn to communicate in English, they still cannot understand others or make themselves understood. Having a large vocabulary in itself does not mean English competence. Furthermore, TOEFL emphasises language knowledge though it also includes a listening and optional writing test. That is to say, high marks in tests such as TOEFL might only prove students' grammatical knowledge and ability to use English in written form.

English is a foreign language in China, not a second language. There is almost no natural interactive environment for speaking and listening to English. At the same time, the extreme shortage of English teachers has led to a situation in which teachers teach many students at the same time, and there is no time left for students to practise listening and speaking in class. In 1985 and 1986, the English curriculum for Science students and for Arts students only aimed at equipping students with the ability to obtain the information required in one particular discipline. That is to say, the focus of teaching and learning English has long been on skills other than listening and speaking. It was not until the late 1990s that this perception of English as no more than a tool changed and teachers and learners attached importance to listening and speaking. In 1998, there was a survey

among employers of college graduates about their English proficiency. The employers were dissatisfied with the students’ general ability to use English (Liu and Dai, 2004). The authors also make a comparison of the order of importance of the skills as shown in Table 3.2. ‘Leading persons’ refers to those who are responsible for English teaching, who may or may not teach English themselves.

Table 3.2 Order of importance of language skills, according to employers, leading persons and teachers (Liu and Dai, 2004).

Employers	Listening →Reading→Speaking
Leading persons	Listening→Reading→Speaking
Teachers	Reading→Speaking→Listening

It seems that those students who were employed after graduation were expected to be capable of understanding what others said. However, when they were taught in universities, they were only taught to understand what the others had written. ‘Leading persons’ might have realised the requirements of employers, therefore, they also put emphasis on the ability of listening. When the curriculum was revised in 1998, listening, speaking, writing, and translating were ranked at the same requirement level (MOE, 1999). However, this revised curriculum was not implemented fully: teachers continued to ignore the opinion of the general public about the need for all-round development of language proficiency and stuck to the lop-sided focus on reading ability alone.

Between 2000 and 2003, a survey sponsored by the Ministry of Education was conducted throughout China, reviewing relevant government documents, speeches by high-ranking officials, and more than 240 articles published by over 50 journals, and questionnaire responses were collected from 1200 teachers working at 40 universities in all parts of the country to find out learners’ achievement and problems in English learning. There was also an urgent call for users of English who could not only read and write but also speak and listen. On the basis of these findings, the recommendation as to an appropriate direction for the Reform of English teaching at College level were as follows:

- The stress on reading ability alone should be changed and listening and speaking should also receive attention;
- New ideas, such as the communicative approach, learner-centred teaching, learner autonomy, and web-assisted instruction, should be introduced and popularised among teachers of English;
- Differences across universities should be recognized and respected and unhealthy competition should be terminated;
- A more communicative CET test format should be introduced to test learner's ability to use English both orally and in written form;
- The advantages of the Internet, DVD and other multi-media resources methods should be exploited.

(Liu and Dai, 2004)

In March 2003 the Ministry of Education launched the project 'Reform of National English Teaching'. Liu and Dai (2004) present the Guidelines for the syllabus revision working group as follows:

'The times are moving forward by leaps and bounds. Our rapidly developing national economy has set forth higher and more urgent requirements for College English teaching, particularly for students' ability to actually use the language. The curriculum in 1999 has made its good contribution. However, since great changes have taken place in the overall situation and there is a general rise in the command of English by the freshmen, we need to move along with the times and write up a new document which will guide our current CET as well as for a period of time to come, so as to quicken the steps along the process of reform.'

(Liu and Dai, 2004: 5)

3.1.2 The revised College English Curriculum Teaching Requirements

'The College English Curriculum Teaching Requirements (for trial implementation)' (this is the exact title in the official documents) was introduced in 2004, and the final version of the 'College English Curriculum Teaching Requirements' in 2007. Currently, the main target of College English teaching is to cultivate students' all-round ability, especially in listening and speaking. Crucial to the realisation of this aim is the exploitation of IT. With this in mind, the curriculum emphasises the importance of students' ability to learn autonomously and communicate across cultures. It also makes it

clear that universities should draw up rational, systematic and individualised syllabuses based on their own situation, such as the professional levels of both teachers and students, the availability of facilities, the number of both teachers and students, and the major disciplines of students within the university (e.g. some universities focus on arts whilst others may focus on science or medicine; therefore, student needs may vary.) As regards teaching objectives, it states:

‘The objective of College English is to develop students’ ability to use English in a well-rounded way, especially in listening and speaking, so that in their future studies and careers as well as social interactions they will be able to communicate effectively, and at the same time enhance their ability to study independently and improve their general cultural awareness so as to meet the needs of China’s social development and international exchanges.’

(MOE, 2007: 25)

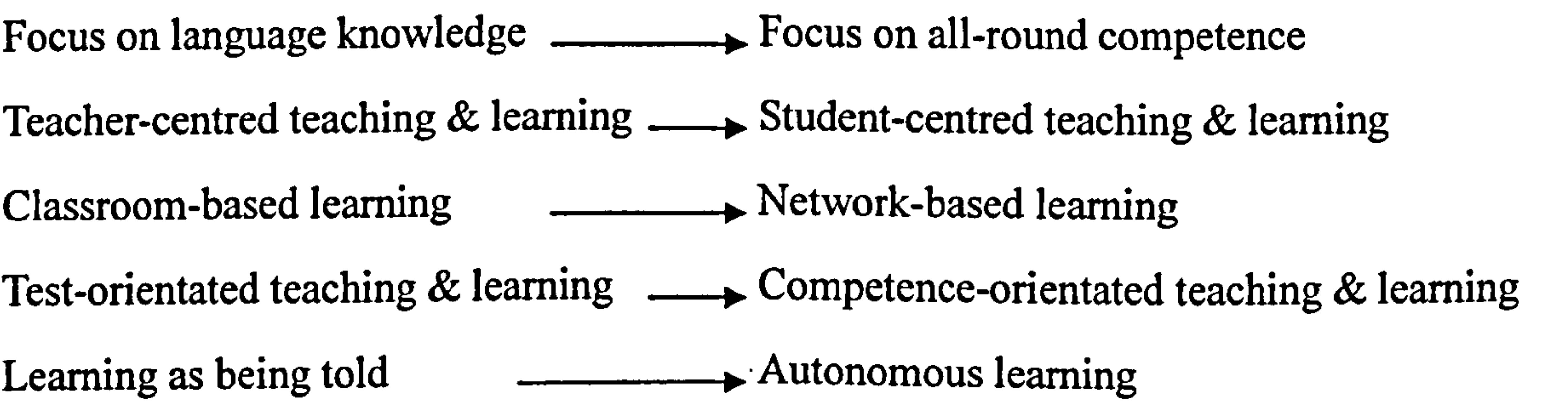
Compared with the objectives of the 1999 Curriculum, the new Requirements emphasise the importance of using English in a ‘well-rounded way’. In the 1999 Curriculum, the aims were to ‘develop well reading competence and *some* ability in listening, speaking, writing and translating’ (MOE, 1999:1).

The Reform covers three main aspects. First, the curriculum was revised, and the focus of teaching was switched from reading comprehension to listening, speaking and integrated ability. Second, the teaching mode was changed radically. The previous mode was composed of textbooks, chalk, and blackboard. The students simply listened to the teacher in the classroom. The new mode makes use of the Internet, teaching software, and classroom application of various facilities. There is more explicit emphasis on students learning through their own initiative. Moreover, the content of the CET was modified to match the new curriculum for the purpose of more emphasis on listening and speaking.

Of these three aspects, the second is of most importance as regards my research focus. The new mode of English teaching in the universities is a combination of classroom teaching and student self-access-learning via CWISs (Campus-Wide Information Systems). Under this system, different aspects of the syllabus are catered for in different ways. Teachers might give lectures on grammar, reading, composition and translation to sixty or more students in the classroom and the students independently use the software

on CWISs to improve their listening and speaking ability. Students decide on their own schedule for the latter; small groups of students might also work together as a group supported by the teachers.

Xia (2005) presents her interpretation of the new Requirements and argues that three relationships should be dealt with properly if the aims of the new Requirements are to be realised: the relationship between basic language knowledge (i.e. grammar, vocabulary, phonology) and all-round competence in using the language; the relationship between developing all-round competence and an emphasis on listening and speaking; and the relationship between learner-computer learning based on the Internet and learner-teacher learning based on classroom teaching. Considering these relationships, the new Requirements actually require several shifts as follows:



These shifts will all be discussed in the course of this chapter.

The Requirements do not provide detailed instruction about what to teach, but delegate responsibility to individual universities for course design decisions. In addition, the new Requirements also took full consideration of the varieties of conditions in China; therefore, three levels were set for undergraduate College English teaching so that ‘the teaching could follow the principle of providing different guidance for different groups of students and instructing them in accordance with their aptitude so as to meet the specific needs of individualised teaching’ (MOE, 2007:25). As regards Listening Comprehension, the three levels are as shown in Table 3.3:

Table 3.3 Three levels of Listening Comprehension requirements (College English Curriculum Requirements, 2007: 26-30)

Basic Requirements	Intermediate Requirements	Advanced Requirements
Students should be able to follow classroom instructions, everyday conversations, and lectures on general topics conducted in English. They should be able to understand English radio and TV programmes spoken at a speed of about 130 to 150 words per minute (wpm), grasping the main ideas and key points. They are expected to be able to employ basic listening strategies to facilitate comprehension.	Students should generally be able to follow talks and lectures in English, to understand longer English radio and TV programmes on familiar topics spoken at a speed of around 150 to 180 words per minute (wpm), grasping the main ideas, key points and relevant details. They should be able to understand, by and large, courses in their areas of specialty taught in English.	Students should, by and large, be able to understand radio and TV programmes produced in English speaking countries and grasp the gist and key points. They should be able to follow talks by people from English-speaking countries given at normal speed, and to understand courses in their areas of specialty and lectures in English.

Based on these requirements, the head of the Ministry of Education’s Department of Higher Education, Zhang (2003a), explains that the Requirements provide a general description of what is expected, thus the applicability and realisability need to take account of learners’ cultural background. This is particularly important in relation to written and spoken text. Buck (2001), for example, argues that both linguistic knowledge and non-linguistic knowledge are involved in listening: linguistic knowledge is of different types such as phonology, lexis, syntax, semantics and discourse structure. The non-linguistic knowledge used in comprehension is knowledge about the topic, about the context, the cultural background and general knowledge about the world and how it works. Similar points are made in Brown (1990), Underwood (1989) and Rost (2002). In China, for example, learners can be expected to understand programmes from China Radio International and TV programmes from CCTV-9 (China Central Television International), but they may not be able to understand CNN (Cable News Network USA) or BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) because of their lack of non-linguistic knowledge rather than (or as well as) their lack of linguistic knowledge.

3.1.3 The revised College English Test (CET)

In past decades, Chinese students have been educated in a test-orientated atmosphere. Many universities require their students to pass CET 4 or CET 6 in order to graduate. However, the degree, Wang (2006) has argued, should be much more a certificate relating to the student's knowledge of his / her major than an English certificate. At the same time, many employers require a CET certificate no matter whether the job is related to English or not. CET is thus regarded as a vital criterion for a graduate. It is also taken for granted that a graduate with good marks in the CET must be a good student. Moreover, universities throughout the country are evaluated by their students' pass rate on this test. It will be clear from this that, regardless of whether one feels this to be an overemphasis, great importance is attached to the CET. The serious consequences are that normal teaching is replaced by preparation for tests in order to push up the pass rate. Liu and Dai (2004) argue that CET should be optional and should not be a prerequisite for graduation. It should be related to the College English course and simply serve to measure how effective the course has been or how much a student has learned. That is to say, this standardised one-fits-all test should be a criterion for evaluating learners' English levels instead of a generalised criterion for learners' overall ability.

Quite apart from the way its results are used, the CET suffers from the inherent defects of an exam based on multiple-choice items in that it tests not language proficiency, but only fragmented knowledge about English. Gao (2003) compared two tests in a university: the same passage was given to two groups of students of the same grade. One group had to translate some of the sentences in the text into Chinese while the other group was tested by multiple choice comprehension questions. The first group scored an average of 42 out of 100 while the second group scored an average of 73. 390 students from another university in Beijing sat a similar test. Those who did a multiple choice test gained an average of 88.3 out of 100 while those required to translate got an average of only 32.4. These figures show that because multiple-choice test takers could guess from the choices supplied, they might achieve a relatively high mark even though they might

not have understood the whole passage. That is to say, learner’s proficiency level might not be accurately represented by tests of multiple choice. Liu and Dai (2004) also investigated teachers’ opinions of the validity of the CET (see Figure 3.1, below):

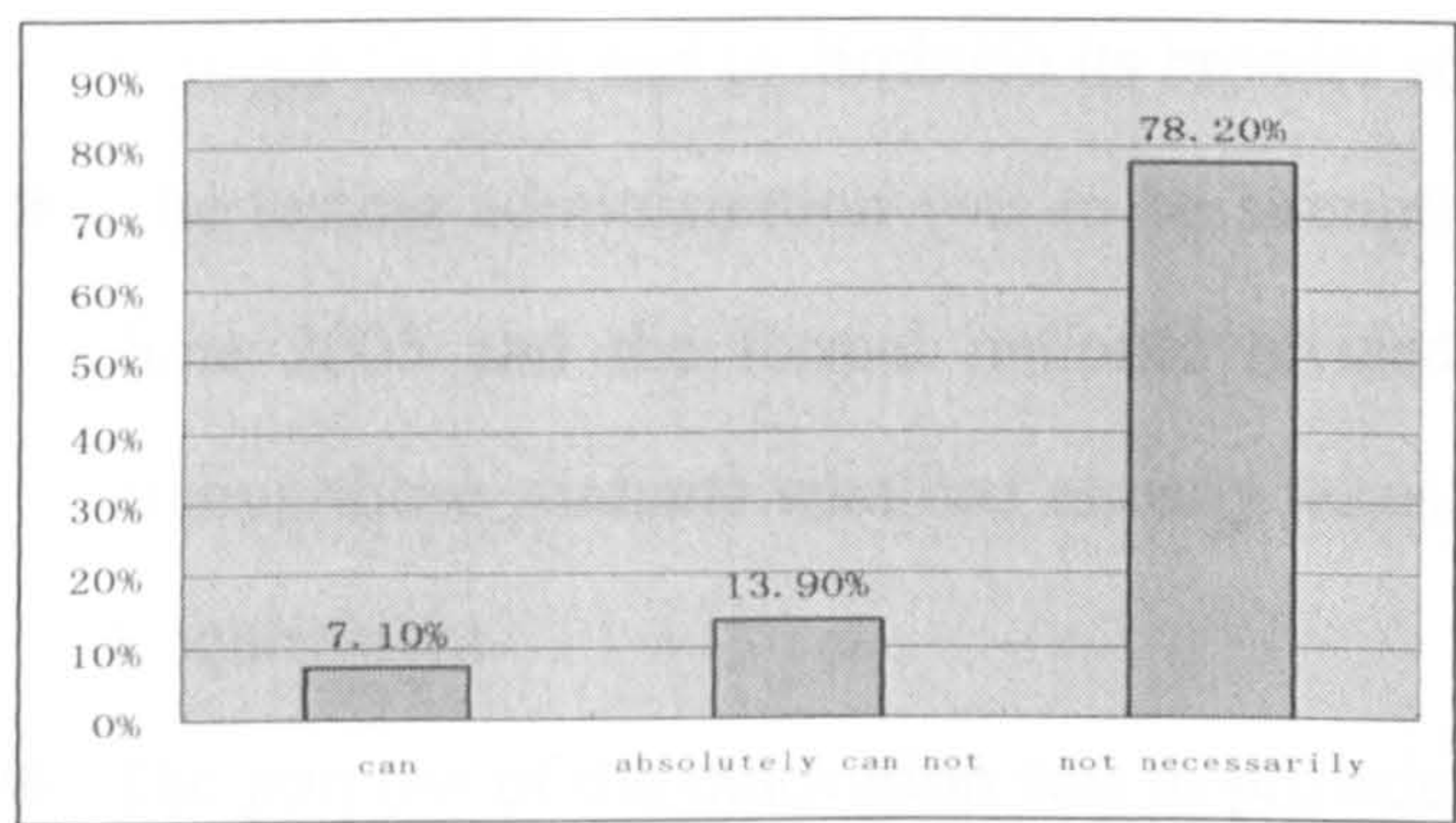


Figure 3.1 Teachers’ opinions of the CET’s validity (as representing English proficiency)

As can be seen from Figure 3.1, only a very small minority accept that the CET scores accurately represent test-takers’ English proficiency. 13.9% are convinced that the CET scores certainly do not represent test-takers’ English proficiency, and the vast majority think they are not necessarily representative. That is to say, most teachers do not think the CET scores accurately represent test-takers’ English proficiency. Wang (2006) also argues that some students memorise vocabulary and do numerous exercises in order to achieve the CET certificate; unfortunately, their English proficiency does not increase in any practical sense.

As part of the National English Teaching Reform, the CET has also been reformed. At the News Briefing of the Ministry of Education in 2005, Wu (2005) introduced the main ideas of the Reform of the CET:

- The testing curriculum was to be revised in accordance with the College English Curriculum Teaching Requirements. The focus would be on the development of new exercise formats, the content of the examination and the format of the examination.
- The score report system was to be completely changed. Previously, the total score was 100 and the revised one would be 710. There would be no ‘passing score’ and there would be no ‘passing certificate’, and the test-takers would only get a ‘score report’.

Furthermore, learners would only be permitted to take the test during the academic years when they were registered students; that is to say, learners would not be allowed to take the test after graduation (or prior to entering the university). These were measures to reinstate the original function of CET – to serve teaching and learning College English and to diminish its broader social function.

- The testing administration was to be strengthened. The initial trial test took place in June 2005 and the formal national revised CET commenced from January 2006 among those students who had already taken the revised College English Curriculum Requirement.
- The purpose of the innovation was to provide clear guidance for teachers and students in terms of the relationship between teaching-learning and testing. The aim of the test was to measure more precisely university students' all-round English competence, especially listening and speaking.
- The committee reemphasised that CET should not necessarily be a criterion for graduation. This would be the university's own choice based on the status of their students and their teaching facilities. Students were also entitled to make their own decision whether to take the test or not based on their career plans. Hence, the CET was designed and taken as a standard for verifying the effectiveness of language teaching-learning instead of a baton for teaching-learning. ('Baton' is a widely used word in China when one refers to the relationship between CET and English teaching-learning, like a conductor's baton.)

Based on these ideas, a new model of CET 4 has been designed. A pilot was launched in 2006 and put into nationwide use in January 2007. As regards Listening Comprehension, the focus of this study, the new model attaches more importance to Listening Comprehension, which is now allocated 35% of the total mark. The listening resources used in the test are drawn from lectures, broadcast and TV programmes. The Reading Comprehension component consists of two parts: Careful Reading and Fast Reading. More importance is attached to Fast Reading and the proportion of non-multiple-choice exercises has increased. The marks allocated to each part of the exam

are shown in Table 3.4. Further comparisons of the previous CET 4 and new CET 4 can be found in Figure 3.2 and Table 3.5.

Table 3.4: The revised CET 4

	Content	Format of exercises	Weighting	
Listening Comprehension	Dialogues	Multiple Choice	15%	35%
	Passages	Multiple Choice & Compound Dictation	20%	
Reading	Careful Reading	Multiple Choice & Blank Filling	25%	35%
	Fast Reading	True/False & Blank Filling & Others	10%	
Integrated items	Cloze/Correction	Multiple Choice / Correction	10%	15%
	Questions & Answer / Translation	Short Answers / Chinese→ English Translation	5%	
Writing	Writing tasks	Writing	15%	

In the table, the diagonal slash means that those two types of exercise do not appear in the same test; test takers do not know which type is going to be used until they open the test paper. For example, ‘Cloze / Correction’ means that there might be Cloze in one test and Correction in another test. Compound Dictation is one of the most difficult and perhaps most unusual among all the tasks, so a little explanation may be helpful. *Compound dictation* was first used in CET 4 in June 1997. A passage is read three times, students can look at the test paper while listening and fill in ten blanks in the passage. They fill in the first seven blanks with the exact words they hear. For the next three blanks, they need to fill in missing information, either using the exact words they have just heard or writing down the main points in their own words.

Differences between the previous test and the revised version specifically related to the listening component can be seen in Figure 3.2.

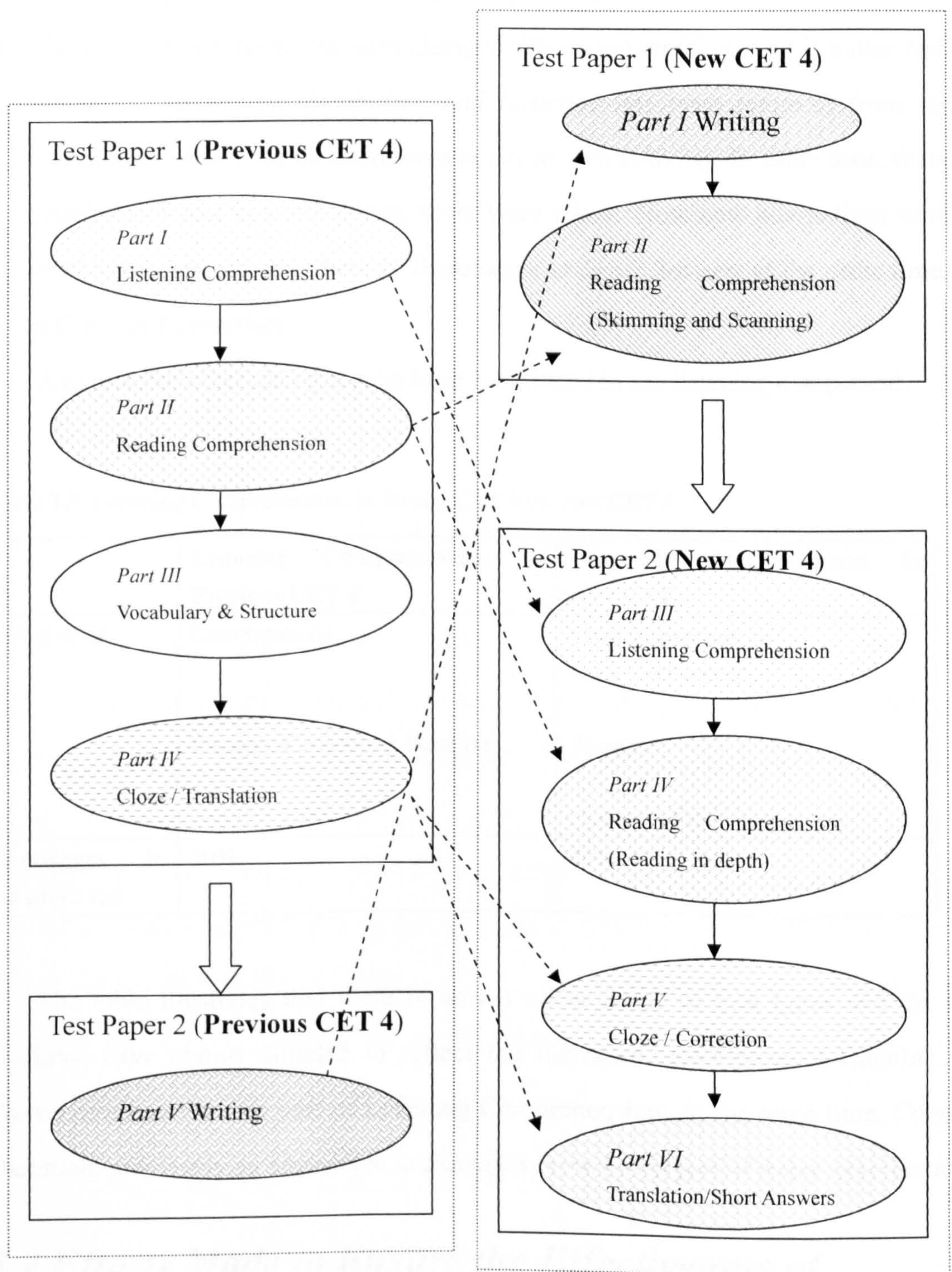


Figure 3.2: Previous CET 4 vs. New CET 4

Figure 3.2 shows that:

- With regard to the format of test paper, the sequence of the test has been changed. *Writing* used to be the final part of the test, but it is now part one. *Listening*

Comprehension now forms part of Test Paper Two.

- The types of task have also been changed. *Skimming and Scanning* is a new task type, whilst the section on *Vocabulary and Structure* has been removed from the test. *Translation* used to be an alternative to *Cloze*; that is to say, in some tests, there were *Translations* and in some others, there were *Cloze*. Now new alternatives have been introduced: in each test, there is *Translation* or *Short Answer*; at the same time, there is *Cloze* or *Correction*.

A number of other changes have been introduced in the listening component.

Table 3.5: Listening Comprehension in former CET 4 vs. new CET 4

	Listening Comprehension in Previous CET 4	Listening Comprehension in New CET 4
Inclusive of	Conversations Passages/Compound dictation	Short Conversations Long Conversations Passages Compound Dictation
Percentages in the whole test	20%	35%

The table illustrates that there is now a wider range of task types and the marks available have almost doubled to reflect the increased importance of listening. *Long Conversations* are a new part of Listening Comprehension. At the same time, *Compound Dictation*, previously an alternative to *Passages*, now forms part of every examination.

3.2 Efforts Made to Ensure the Effectiveness of Implementation

Effective implementation of a reform such as this requires cooperation from government, curriculum planners, universities and teachers. At government level, the Ministry of Education invested RMB 23 million (£ 1.53 million) during the process of Reform, according to Wu (2005), the Vice Minister of the Ministry of Education. The

investment included the development of four textbook packages based on the Internet and multi-media technology from four approved publishers; software design; experimental reform projects in 180 universities; 200 research projects in universities nationwide; experimental CET reform projects; and a survey of more than 50 universities in March 2006. Curriculum planners did research on the Reform and were actively involved in those activities. In what follows, the focus is on universities' efforts and the provision of training for teachers.

3.2.1 Universities' efforts at implementation

In 2006, the Ministry of Education, the National Advisory Committee on TEFL in Higher Education and the Office of the National English Teaching Reform sought to investigate progress in implementing the Reform by carrying out a survey in more than 50 universities. The resulting report shows that at the very beginning of the Reform, some universities did not take action immediately because of uncertainty about the innovation. Some of the teachers were not sure whether the Reform would be successfully implemented so they waited to see what was going on in other universities. That is to say, the Reform was implemented only gradually. In this section, Wuhan University, which is one of the top universities in China, will first be introduced as a detailed example. Brief reference will then be made to the efforts made to implement the Reform by 12 other universities.

➤ *Wuhan University*

Following initial introduction of the Reform, some new programmes were introduced. Zeng and Wu (2006) describe the actions taken in Wuhan University. At the beginning of the first term, students were grouped as regards their English level. Students in 'specialty majors' such as arts or sports were categorized as one group. All other new students took an English test to determine their level. Then the top 900 students were grouped into 'advanced classes', and those outside the top 900 were grouped into 'normal classes'. It was decided that teaching strategies would be different for the three groups. For specialty

majors, the focus was on basic language knowledge and the textbook was 'New Concept English'. For normal class students, the focus was on all-round competence including listening, speaking, writing, reading and translating, and the textbook was the revised version of 'New College English'. For advanced students, the aim was to develop their horizon of knowledge as well as all-round abilities, and they used the same textbooks as English majors.

The University invested RMB 80 million (£5.33 million) in setting up twelve classrooms exclusively for autonomous learning. This permitted 756 students to learn simultaneously via the Internet and the intranet.

If a student's CET score was higher than 85, which means 'excellent' English proficiency, this CET score would be counted as his / her test score for the term.

Extracurricular activities were encouraged. For example, a website was established for English learning in 2005; and a newspaper, 'English Learning', which published cultural articles and exercises relevant to reading, writing, listening, speaking and translating, was edited with teachers' support. An 'English Corner' became a stage for English activities and presentations. Teachers also participated to observe students' improvement. English Corner is a widespread way of practising oral English in China. English users from various backgrounds go to the campus or a park during weekends or evenings to talk to others in English.

There had already been a radio station before the Reform. It had been running for about twenty years to provide listening materials, as well as organizing competitions in spoken English, and had contributed greatly to students' opportunities for after-class learning activities. In addition, students working for the station developed outstanding competence in both language and social ability.

A training project in collaboration with Ohio State University USA was introduced and American teachers were invited to Wuhan University to teach students during the summer vacation. A sum of RMB10 million (£710,000) was invested each year to develop students' spoken English and the ability to communicate. In addition to the benefits for students, Chinese teachers also benefited from the project. When a teacher from Ohio State University was teaching students, one or two young Chinese teachers

worked as assistants so that they could also learn from the American teachers.

Many other universities have also taken steps to implement the Reform and to develop learners' all-round ability, as required by the new Curriculum, including investment in multi-media classrooms and a College English teaching-learning network, teacher training, textbook adaptation and the provision of extracurricular activities. The following 12 universities from various parts of China are examples. All the figures were reported by MOE (2006) and by the universities concerned.

Table 3.6 Implementation of the Reform in 12 universities in China

	Investment	Description of the implementation	Outcomes reported
Beijing Jiao Tong University	RMB 6 million (£430,000)	A College English Teaching Base was established to arrange College English teacher training, to carry out curriculum and syllabus innovation, to improve the College English teaching environment, and to organise research projects on College English teaching.	
Beijing University of Chemical Technology		Net-based learning materials were downloaded to establish a database for testing students' learning after class. It experimentally used computers for an oral test. 60 students took a 30-minute computer-based oral test which was recorded and assessed electronically.	The computer-based oral test was proved to have saved both teachers' and students' time.
Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications		Samples of teachers and students were taken to compare teaching-learning outcomes in traditional teacher-centred classes and classrooms with multi-media facilities.	Students expressed their preference for learning with a combination of multi-media facilities and teachers' instruction.
Capital Normal University	RMB 2 million (£140,000)	Four Internet classrooms were set up for experimental teaching-learning with multi-media facilities. A new curriculum was designed and courses were redesigned for 16 experimental classes.	The practical conclusion was that the net-based autonomous learning mode had facilitated students' active learning.
Guang Xi University	RMB 500,000 (£36,000)	An Internet based 51-seat classroom was established. There were also several teacher training courses to familiarize teachers with computers and the Internet.	

Northwestern Polytechnical University	RMB 4 million (£ 290, 000)	The most modernized multi-media classrooms were all allocated for College English teaching. All the courses were recorded and uploaded onto the intranet for students to use at any time. Thus, it was guaranteed that students had more varied choices of media or venue for English learning and they were able to make their own schedule of learning.	
Renmin University of China	RMB 2 million (£ 140,000)	Multi-media facilities were installed and more than 200 research projects were carried out to study teaching methods, learning strategies, learning environment, evaluation models, teachers and learners.	The research outcomes constituted greatly to the further improvement of English teaching-learning.
Shandong Liaocheng University		Some teaching materials were experimentally uploaded onto the intranet for all the teachers and students so that individual teachers were relieved from repetition of teaching tasks.	Teachers were freed to take part in training courses, conferences and further education.
Shandong University		An 'introductory course' was designed at the beginning of the first term so that new students would have a clear idea what to expect from their course and how to learn autonomously with multi-media facilities and the Internet.	The course proved to have been very helpful in preparing students to learn with computers and to adjust from teacher-centred to learner-centred English teaching-learning.
Shanghai Fudan University		Computers had already been used for teaching-learning before the Reform. As part of the Reform, teachers were allocated laptops for classroom teaching and individual teacher websites were set up for pictures and other information relevant to texts or students' practical writing. Computers were also used for an English proficiency level test and students were required to take an oral test so that all-round ability could be assessed and further developed.	

Shanghai Jiao Tong University		Students were invited to suggest classroom teaching innovations and to design classroom activities.	At the end of one term, College English had become the most popular course on campus. Responses to an on-line survey suggested that 87% of the College English learners were satisfied with the course.
Southeast University		A Foreign Language Teacher Development Fund was established to send teachers abroad for further education and international conferences each year. At the same time, 8 to 10 scholars are invited from other universities each year to give academic lectures.	

In addition to the above examples of Wuhan University and the other 12 universities, many other universities invested substantial amounts of money in the Reform and took steps to ensure that students could be guaranteed hours of on-line autonomous learning every week. It was also common practice to encourage the use of English through English corners, English lectures, English parties and English contests.

3.2.2 Professional development for teachers

There have never been enough English teachers in China. As mentioned previously, the quality of English teachers is the key to enhance the level of English learning in the whole country. Most students are learning English from teachers, or to be more specific, are influenced by their English teachers while learning English. Consequently, the achievements of the students reflect on their teachers. The inadequacy of the teachers is blamed when students perform badly. Teacher training is encouraged in every university but cannot be guaranteed either in terms of funding or in terms of time. Funding policies vary from university to university. Generally speaking, if a university is in urgent need of qualified teachers, the amount of funding could be large; on the other hand, if there are enough qualified teachers in a university, there might not be any funding for teacher

training. As regards time, College English teachers are always overworked and always teach in large classes with more than fifty students (Chen, 2003; Chen, 2008). At the same time, they have to do some research in order to get promoted. They rarely have opportunities for professional training so must somehow find time for self-improvement.

If funding and time is available, there are some ways that the teachers may choose to do in-service training, and to some extent they are free to choose the most convenient approaches.

- *Full time study for degree.*

After teaching for a while, teachers may choose to study full time for a Master's degree or PhD. The universities usually agree to this, but limit the number of teachers allowed time off each year because of the number of teaching hours to be covered. English teachers might wish to study further abroad, which is obviously helpful for a language teacher, but the universities might not support this financially, and many teachers therefore give up this idea because of the high cost of studying abroad.

- *Part time study for degree.*

This choice is more acceptable for both the teachers and the universities. The teachers continue their teaching while pursuing their degrees.

- *Part time non-degree study.*

Non-degree study, which typically leads to a diploma, is not subject to a strict entrance or exit exam, and can be pursued during university vacations. Some universities have already ceased supporting this type of study.

- *Visiting scholars.*

Universities may designate some promising teachers to study in other universities. This opportunity is usually limited to senior teachers. A few outstanding teachers might be sent to universities abroad.

- *Short-term training.*

Short-term training includes lectures by well known professors; attendance at conferences and seminars and computer assisted teaching training courses.

- *Special training courses sponsored by the publishing houses.*

Some well known publishing houses sponsor an annual training course on the English

textbooks they are using. This is a very effective way to introduce a new textbook to the university English teachers. For their part, teachers are willing to pilot and give feedback on the materials.

The Reform requires English teachers to be more capable in both all-round competence and in using computers. Hence, there exists an urgent need for teacher training. Jia (2007) suggests that teachers should always teach students in 'English-only'. Moreover, the new teaching mode emphasises the students' all-round competence. Consequently, the teachers themselves should be 'all-round competent'. It is impossible to realise the new mode if the teachers themselves are not adept at handling computers and the Internet. Lu (2005) also points out that inexperienced teachers would feel at loss when problems occur with computers or the Net.

Jia (2007) argues that teachers are no longer the controllers and feeders in the classroom. They are not only teaching the language to students, but developing students' learning ability. They therefore need to take on the roles of organisers, initiators, navigators, and educators in order to facilitate students' autonomous learning. In short, teachers must be more supportive than ever before.

After the Reform was introduced, the Department of Higher Education organised a nationwide training course in May 2005 for university authorities and some English teachers on the 'National English Teaching Reform Software Systems'. The publishers of the four new textbook packages presented the teaching software, and those teachers from the universities that had already tried the software were invited to demonstrate their practical use of that software and the practical use of the Internet. After this course, there were training courses in universities throughout the whole country, and teachers took lectures given by those who had already been trained.

The Government encouraged experience exchange among universities and among teachers. Hence, conferences and seminars were organised for university authorities and teachers to share experiences about the process of implementation; therefore, experienced and well-known top universities, such as Beijing Jiao Tong University and Beijing Institute of Technology, received visitors every week from various universities for the purpose of learning about and discussing the implementation. Experienced teachers and

organisers also went to other universities to help train teachers in how to implement the Reform effectively.

3.2.3 An example of a learner-centred and multimedia-facilitated College English class

There is evidence that the advanced technological facilities have contributed a great deal to both classroom teaching and students' autonomous learning. Experts studied the curriculum and adjusted the teaching process to make full use of available facilities and stimulate learners' autonomous learning. Here is one example of the use of a text in a College English course. Table 3.7 illustrates how the multi-media facilities were used to teach over a unit of three x 45-minute-classroom lessons. This design was based on studies by Liu and Jia (1998) and Cui (2004).

Table 3.7. Teaching one text-based unit in College English

Stages	Procedure	Multi-media resources	Teachers' Role	Learners' Role	Time (minutes)
Lesson 1 (45 minutes)					
Introduction	Present teaching aims and contents	Projector	Explaining	Listening	5
Orientation	Present questions relevant to the theme; set the background	Projector	Questioning	Answering	10
Text analysis	Check 'Key Words'	CD-ROM (Vocabularies)	Questioning & Checking	Dictation & Sentence Making	5
	Check understanding of cultural background	CD-ROM (Background)	Questioning	Discussing & Answering	5
	Group members (3) take turns to explain the text	CD-ROM (Notes)	Listening & Questioning	Explaining & Answering	15
	Explain structure, theme, rhetoric, paragraphing, summarising, and writing technique	CD-ROM (Structure)	Explaining & Questioning	Listening & Discussing	5
Lesson 2 (45 minutes)					
Questions & Answers	Teachers and students ask questions on key points in the text	Projector & CD-ROM (Notes)	Questioning & Answering	Questioning, Discussing & Answering	10
Discussion in Groups	Students discuss in groups the topics assigned by the teacher and express their own viewpoints	Projector	Listening & Questioning	Discussing & Presenting	10
Presentation	Groups present the outcomes of their discussions in whatever form they wish	Projector & Students' presentations	Listening & Questioning	Presenting, Explaining, Listening & Discussing	10
Supplementary materials	Teacher presents supplementary learning resources using CD-ROM and the Internet	Projector, CD-ROM, Video & the Internet	Presenting, Explaining & Questioning	Watching, Discussing & Answering	10
Evaluation	Students evaluate their own performance, and the value of activities and the lesson as a whole. Teacher comments on students' performance	Projector	Listening, Recording & Concluding	Commenting, Suggesting & Listening	5
Lesson 3 (45 minutes)					
Exercises	Checking students' exercises in CD-ROM	CD-ROM Textbook	Questioning, Checking	Questioning & Answering	30
Discussing learning strategies	Students discuss in groups their learning strategies (e.g. for learning vocabulary or developing listening skills)	Projector	Questioning & Introducing	Discussing & Recording	10
Preparing the next text	Presenting the focus for preparing the next text	Projector	Explaining	Making notes	5

From the above table, it can be seen that learners are actively involved in the class for more than 80 minutes (underlined in the table) without counting the exercise time or answering questions, i.e. for more than 60% of the class time. Multi-media facilities are used in all stages to present information and import learning resources. In addition, the nature of demands on learners during class requires them to prepare autonomously outside the class. This offers a contrast with the situation prior to the Reform when there was less pressure on learners to prepare before they came to the class, because they might just have sat and listened to whatever teachers presented.

3.3 Evaluations of the Innovation So Far

As a result of the Reform, students are expected to have developed all-round competence and a capacity for learning autonomously with multi-media facilities. To assess whether these aims have been achieved, a number of studies have been carried out.

When the new mode of teaching-learning was first introduced, some problems arose. Not all the English teachers were familiar with computer assisted teaching. Some might have known how to teach with multi-media facilities, but the new mode is more demanding as it requires interaction between students and software, as well as between students and teachers. Some teachers had been teaching for many years, and were used to the old teaching mode based on textbooks and blackboard. They were taught in a textbook-and-blackboard way when they were students, so it was difficult for them to accept and apply the new mode. Furthermore, not all the students were self-disciplined enough to learn via CWISs, they might just surf the Net or immerse themselves in games instead of practising the language. According to one report from 'the National Advisory Committee on TEFL in Higher Education and the Office of the National English Teaching Reform in China', the expensive software and CWISs had not been made best use of (MOE, 2006).

Sections 3.3.1 to 3.3.4 survey evaluation activity in the various universities in relation to developments in autonomous learning (3.3.1), multi-media facilities & the Internet (3.3.2), textbooks (3.3.3) and testing (3.3.4). Section 3.3.5 presents three more

comprehensive studies of the implementation of the Reform.

3.3.1 Evaluations of autonomous learning

Autonomous learning is one of the aims of the Reform, and some investigation was carried out during the preliminary phase from 2003 to 2004 to study whether it has been realised. Many students had already got used to taking English classes every day and were used to test-orientated learning before they came to universities, therefore, they were less autonomous than had been expected (see e.g. Liu, Ke and Liu, 2005 on Peking University, and Zhu, 2005 on Nan Jing University). At that time, teachers did not offer guidance on learning strategies or advice on adapting to new learning habits, so the outcomes were not satisfactory. The same results were reported in other studies (see e.g. Ma and Meng, 2008 on Xi'an International Studies University).

In 2000, Gan had conducted a research project in China and in Hong Kong which attempted to identify the links between self-directedness for language learning and English language learning attainment among tertiary level Chinese EFL students. Drawing on the findings of that study, Gan, Humphreys and Hamp-Lyons (2004) carried out a one-semester follow-up study to look closely at two small groups of tertiary-level EFL learners, from the University of Science and Technology of China and Anhui University, in order to document how they carried out their out-of-class English learning, as well as to elaborate issues that might be critical to understanding the variability that had already been observed in Gan's earlier quantitative study. Their research results suggest apparent differences in attitudes towards the College English course between successful and unsuccessful students. The successful students held a positive attitude, though most of them found the regular classroom English teaching rigid or traditional. In contrast, the unsuccessful students displayed an overall negative attitude. Furthermore, the analysis reveals striking differences in terms of self-management in language learning between successful and unsuccessful students under study. The successful students attributed their success to controllable factors such as effort and strategy use, whilst the unsuccessful students tended to find it difficult to adjust to the university language

learning environment and experienced a noticeable sense of helplessness. Gan *et al.*'s investigation points to an important relationship between learning attitudes and learning outcomes. That is to say, if learners are able to discipline their learning and hold a positive attitude, they are more likely to be successful; on the contrary, if learners are less successful, it is more likely that they passively or negatively resist learning-teaching. However, this was a small-scale case study, and during only one semester, therefore, there might have been some particular factors in that semester which influenced the research outcomes. If these factors could also be explored, one could seek to enhance them or reduce their importance.

In Nan Kai University's experimental use of the new curriculum and new textbooks, some differences were found between high level students and low level students: high level students improved as regards participation and autonomous learning, but low level students, especially those with poor listening and speaking abilities, did not actively participate in classroom activities or after-class activities (Wang, 2005). In Wei's (2005) questionnaire-based research in the China University of Geosciences in Beijing, 77% of 534 students agreed that their autonomy had increased (p.237), but this figure was based on student self-report. Some researchers have expressed concern whether students are really studying autonomously, or rather, just have more time to think about the idea that they 'should learn English more actively' (see, e.g., Lou, 2005:393). Lin (2008) also argues that there is a gap between learners' attitude towards autonomy and their autonomous learning ability.

It appears, then, that autonomous learning has not yet been realised nationwide. He and Zhong (2007) carried out research in a top university in Guangzhou and two universities in Hunan Province. They argue that learners cannot really control their pace while studying; instead, they are affected by many factors such as the learning location and access time. Chen (2006) argues that autonomous English learning in China must be integrated with traditional teaching and that 'autonomy' should therefore be considered 'limited autonomy' (p.35). The reasons include:

- English is learnt for the purpose of testing, career and promotion instead of as an essential tool for

living;

- English is a foreign language in China so there is a lack of a native environment for learning;
- English teachers are not able to provide much support as regards language-related culture;
- The evaluation system has not yet been reformed completely so learners need to focus on testing for learning.

(Adapted from Chen, 2006: 35, original in Chinese)

Jia (2006b) also argues that autonomous learning cannot be developed totally by learners themselves; instead, it should be included in the curriculum and become one of the teaching objectives. In short, teachers' involvement is very important for developing learners' autonomy.

Two forms of teacher involvement are suggested by Jiang (2006): *active direction*, i.e., teachers actively provide support for learners and *prohibitive intervention*, i.e., teachers intervene and try to prevent some problems occurring in students' learning. For example, active direction might be offered at the beginning of learners' period of study to help them to plan their learning. In this stage, teachers can encourage learners to communicate with others and actively supervise their learning. They can also offer suggestions on what to learn or where to find learning materials. Prohibitive intervention, on the other hand, can be used when there seems a danger that learners will lose interest in learning or seem incapable of directing their own learning. In such cases, teachers can organise activities to stimulate their interest and confidence or set assignments to be completed within a given period of time for the purpose that autonomous learning could be encouraged.

3.3.2 Evaluations of multi-media facilities and the Internet

Before the Reform, multi-media facilities were seen as supplementary learning resources but after the introduction of the new curriculum, learning via multi-media facilities and via the Internet and the intranet has become one of the most important means that students use to learn and practise English. Some researchers have studied the application of multi-media facilities in English teaching-learning in China (see e.g. Feng and Wan, 2003; Han, 2003; Wang and Sun, 2005; and Gu, 2007).

The intranet was evaluated as helpful by both teachers and students for various reasons:

- It is easier for learners to control the pace and they may feel more confident to follow their own steps (see e.g. Ying, 2005, Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications; Gong and Zhu, 2006, Hunan Agricultural University).
- Competence in listening and speaking has been enhanced by using multi-media facilities and the intranet (see e.g. Li, 2005b, University of Science and Technology of China; Xiao and Guo, 2006, South China Agricultural University).
- The Internet has provided much more high quality authentic English learning materials and the content of learning and English studies has become more interesting. At the same time, more and better quality materials are available (see e.g. Li, 2005a, China Agricultural University; Gu, 2007, Suzhou University)
- More importantly, learners are able to choose the most suitable resources for their own practice (see e.g. Zhu & Gong, 2005, Shanghai University of Sport; Gu, 2007, Suzhou University; Ma and Meng, 2008, Xi'an International Studies University).

It seems that all these have resulted in improvement. In spite of these advantages, there is some evidence that students have not yet fully adapted to studying via the Internet and the intranet (He and Zhong, 2007). Liu *et al.* (2005) argue that problems are inevitable when the Internet and the intranet and multi-media facilities are widely employed in teaching-learning. These problems can be classified as follows:

Ability to use the facilities

Learning with multi-media facilities and via the Internet requires the ability to operate these facilities. Computers were not popular among learners in China when the Reform was first introduced, therefore, first-year students needed to spend many hours learning how to use the facilities. A student from a remote area in China with limited knowledge of computers reported in Liu *et al.*'s (2005) investigation: 'It is really a struggle for us first-year students, especially from remote areas, to keep pace with learning via the

Internet' (p.15, original in Chinese). In many other studies, students also complained about the difficulty of operating computers (see e.g. Li, 2005b; Gao and Wang, 2005, Shandong University; and Wang and Zhao, 2006). Liu and Kong (2008) suggest that learners' skill in operating computers and in running software is the initial step toward CALL teaching and learning.

Access to the facilities

The Government and universities have invested a great deal in multi-media facilities. More than 90% of the classrooms in Peking University are equipped with multi-media facilities; perhaps as a consequence, Liu *et al.* (2005) found that 92.2% of their students were satisfied with class hours with these facilities (p.16). However, after-class access to computers is limited. On the one hand, this is due to the lack of balance between the facilities available and the number of students wishing to use them; and on the other hand, it is also due to students' learning habits. In Liu *et al.*'s study, almost half of the students were used to learning in dormitories where there are no computers. Furthermore, students allocated less than 60% of the on-line time to studying (Liu *et al.*, 2005:17). He and Zhong (2007) emphasise that it is vital to make sure that students are able to get access to the facilities, and more importantly, that students are using the facilities to learn.

Software and the intranet

University intranets are not as perfect as they are claimed to be. For example, the intranet may break down because of a bug within the system or some mis-operation. Software design and development are still weak (Chen, 2006). Students may be offered a 'forum' or 'on-line question time', but almost nobody visits these; even when there are supportive on-line resources, students still ask for guidance and instructions (Li, 2005a). There are also reports of problems resulting from the instability of the systems. For example, students might fail to get their scores recorded because the system broke down towards the end of their on-line session; or abnormal icons appeared because of some mistakes in the programme (Jia, 2006b).

There might also be gaps between software design and the usability of that software

in universities. Software designers are good at designing but do not understand the needs of teachers and learners at education, whilst teachers may be good at teaching but not designing software. Cooperation is, therefore, needed in order to produce high quality software and make the system work properly.

Teachers' ability to operate facilities and use the Internet

In order to be able to teach with multi-media facilities and the Internet, teachers have been under pressure to learn how to use computers and the Internet. It has been quite demanding for teachers, especially older, more experienced teachers, to prepare PPT or Flash, instead of or in addition to, their usual paper work. Some teachers were actually novices as far as computer use was concerned (Wang and Sun, 2005; and Mao, 2007). Mao (2007) sums up four reasons for the insufficient teacher training in using computers and the Internet:

1. Teachers have got used to traditional teaching methods;
2. Teacher-training is limited due to financial concerns;
3. The excessive workload hinders teachers from developing extra skills in their spare time;
4. Even when teachers try to use computers and the Internet, the application is restricted to PPT, or the audio-video function of computers.

Similar research outcomes can be found in Xie (2005) and Peng and He (2007).

Mo (2007) argues that teachers in modern education should be qualified in seven Internet-related competences: obtaining information; integrating resources; using the network; teaching design based on the Net; controlling the class in net-circumstances; evaluating net-learning; and communicating via the Net. It is clearly not easy for teachers to acquire all these competences when they are also required to maintain and even enhance their proficiency in English language and their knowledge of the cultures of English-speaking peoples.

The role of multi-media facilities plus the involvement of teachers

Multi-media facilities were introduced into classrooms for the purpose of supporting teaching-learning, but they should not be considered a substitute for teachers. Qiu, Ji and Cheng (2005) argue that teaching via a network is able to improve competence in reading and fundamental knowledge of grammar, but it is not able to improve students' ability to communicate. That is to say, the network works better if teachers are available to organise some Internet-based activities and offer instruction on how to do those activities. Li (2005a) draws the conclusion based on his research in the China Agricultural University that, at least in the short term, multi-media facilities cannot even improve students' ability to deal with difficult listening tasks; instead, the network is only helpful in developing certain basic listening skills. He mentions *Compound Dictation*, which was introduced previously in section 3.1, when he refers to 'difficult listening tasks' (p.340). Hence, conclusions can be drawn that difficult listening tasks such as Compound Dictation require not only listening abilities but also other competences such as spelling and paraphrasing. Multi-media facilities, at least in the short term, can however help develop listening skills such as distinguishing different words, understanding colloquial expressions, and so on. Therefore, simple listening tasks such as dictation or multiple choice can be improved by practising with multi-media facilities.

Feng and Wan (2003) analysed the differences of the two-year achievement test results from three different teaching modes, that is, *learners' autonomous learning only*, *teacher centred instruction* and a mode *combining teachers' presentation with students' performance*, within the multi-media experimental group as well as those from the multi-media experimental group and the traditional classroom control group. The multi-media experimental group achieved consistent superiority over the other groups. Furthermore, the mode that combined teachers' presentation with learners' production was shown to be superior to the other two modes. This experiment testifies to the advantages of the multi-media teaching mode and the conclusions from the research also suggest the best teaching mode with the efforts from both teachers and students. However one weakness in the study lay in the mobility of the participants. Teachers and students in this experiment all selected courses at the beginning of each semester, and due to the limited

facilities, there were frequent changes in the participants.

Considering the above-mentioned advantages and disadvantages, there seems a need to combine students' self-access use of computer facilities with teacher instruction and supervision. Support for this comes from Liu and Kong's (2008) two-year comparison of learners' performance in a 'CALL + Class Instruction' experimental group and those in a 'Class Instruction' only control group. Their results from a national key university in Hubei province prove the feasibility of 'CALL + Class Instruction' in China universities (p.64) and suggest the superiority of this integrated form of provision. Their conclusions were as follows:

'CALL and Class Instruction should complement each other, but fulfil their different tasks respectively. CALL mainly helps learners to gain language input, satisfies their individual learning needs and encourages them to acquire more knowledge in learning, while the input and output of Class Instruction is designed on the basis of the feedback from CALL learners.'

(Liu and Kong, 2008: 64)

Peng, Zhu and Zhong (2008) review papers published in ten major domestic EFL journals from 1996 to 2007, and argue that with the further development of the foreign language curriculum, foreign language teacher education has become a great issue in the field of foreign language teaching in China. More specifically, Jia (2006a) points out that most reports on the Reform have demonstrated concerns about teachers' roles and teachers' ability to use the facilities and the Internet. Thus, it is considered a key to successful implementation of the Reform that teachers are able to operate computers and take full advantage of the Internet.

3.3.3 Evaluations of textbooks

New textbook packages containing multi-media resources such as CDs and on-line materials were designed for the new curriculum. Universities can choose their preferred textbook packages, so the following evaluations were of different new textbooks designed for the Reform. In Ying's (2005) research, 62.1% of 550 students were satisfied and about

69.4% of them claimed that their motivation for learning English was enhanced by using the new textbooks 'New Concept English' (p.92). However, other students claimed that the texts in 'New Concept English' were too difficult and they were reluctant to study after class (Lou, 2005). Zhou (2008) evaluated the textbook 'Zooming in: An Integrated English Course' as regards its effectiveness in promoting learner autonomy. His research involved 370 students and 7 teachers in South China University of Technology using both questionnaires and interviews. The findings show that the new textbook was effective in promoting learner autonomy through developing learners' motivation and attitudes.

There still exist some deficiencies in the new textbooks. Some teachers and students found that they were distracted by the number of optional forms in which the texts were available and the variety of learning focuses. For example, one text may be available in the form of 'text only', 'audio', or 'video'. That is to say, on the one hand, students need to make a decision which form to use or to use all of them; and on the other hand, learners' attention may also be distracted by the pictures or actors / actresses in 'video' programmes. At the same time, Lou (2005) argues that there may be too much input in network-supported classrooms with support from the intranet because teachers can switch the display on screen simply by clicking the mouse. Some students may not have understood what is shown on a screen before teachers progress to the next point. Therefore, the outcomes of using new textbook packages are positive if students spend time in preparing before class what will be presented, or in reviewing after class what they have learned; on the other hand, the results might be even worse than those before the Reform if students do not work after class because not all students are able to understand or grasp all the points presented in class.

From the above discussion on textbooks, it can be concluded that it is not enough simply to have good textbooks: students and teachers play vital roles in using those textbooks. Xia (2008) makes the comment that teaching materials are valuable sources, but they must be used effectively as learning materials, and this may require teachers to update their teaching ideas.

3.3.4 Evaluations of testing

Testing, in the form of CET 4 and CET 6, has also changed during the Reform, and research has been carried out to evaluate these changes. Cai (2007) comments on the new CET 4 that because the aim is now to test students' all-round competence the emphasis of teaching-learning has changed in line with this. This can be referred to as *washback effect*: learners may study for the test, teachers may teach to the test, or test-preparation courses may be offered (Alderson and Wall, 1993; Wall, 1997; and Buck, 2001). For the best outcomes, educators hope that washback can be beneficial to language learning activities. It is therefore worthwhile evaluating the tests used in College English teaching-learning in China.

In Wei's (2005) study, which investigated students' views on how they should be tested, only 12% of 534 students were in favour of traditional CETs and approximately 37% supported the testing model of a combination of a traditional paper test and scores of autonomous learning. Among the remaining students, some (24%) chose a traditional paper test combined with an oral test, and some (8%) supported a model of oral and writing test (p.239). What is interesting in these results is that there was some support autonomous learning; though this was not a majority view. Assessing autonomous learning is not easy, of course. Difficulties include the fact that:

- Students are expected to arrange their own learning schedule, but the schedule might be influenced by marking criteria;
- It requires supervision from teachers;
- Software (and a database) are needed to record students' learning;
- It is not easy to set criteria for measuring students' autonomous learning.

Furthermore, the 2007 Requirements state that at least 30% of the students' final marks should be for on-line learning. However, Jia (2006b) points out that it is impossible for students in all universities in China, even in top universities, to study for the suggested

number of on-line hours because of limited facilities and unstable systems.

Zhang (2008) discusses the CET reform in previous years and he believes that new requirements and revisions to CET will be needed soon. Some universities have already begun to experiment. For example, Fudan University conducted a project on a computer-assisted oral English test (Qiu, 2005). Marking was arranged after the test and teachers were able to replay the test afterwards so that the scores were more reliable. However, there were still some limitations, for example, students felt it odd to talk to a computer, and the types of tasks were limited. This research is nevertheless a valuable preliminary attempt to develop computer-based tests which may make large-scale oral testing feasible. Other similar experimental computer-based oral tests have also been tried in universities in China, such as Beijing University of Chemical Technology and the University of Science and Technology of China.

3.3.5 Integrated evaluation studies

The studies reviewed this far have focused on different aspects of the Reform; in some universities, however, attempts have been made to carry out integrated evaluation studies in order to have a broader view of all aspects of the Reform. Integrated studies in three different universities are reviewed below.

In this section, three further research studies will be discussed as examples of studies examining the implementation of the Reform. Three universities were chosen on the basis of their different locations in China and the style of the research. The studies took place at Hunan University of Arts and Science (Li and Qi, 2007); Shanghai University (Su, 2004); and China University of Geosciences in Beijing (Wei, 2005).

◆ *Hunan University of Arts and Science*

Li and Qi (2007) also carried out a survey to study students' attitudes towards English learning. The outcomes of their research are summarised in Table 3.8, below:

Table 3.8 Outcomes of a survey (excerpt from Li and Qi, 2007, original in Chinese)

Questions	Students' choices		Students' answers to open-ended questions
Motivation & Testing	A. learning English for the purpose of passing CET and to facilitate job hunting	64.1%	*Nothing is meaningful if the testing system remains unchanged.
	B. learning English because English score is one of the main criteria for graduation	27.6%	
	C. learning English because of personal interest	8.3%	
Talking to foreign teachers	A. love to talk to foreign teachers and often go to English Corner	2.1%	*More chances should be offered to practise spoken English; *Non-English majors can be offered chances to talk to native English teachers.
	B. willing to talk to foreign teachers sometimes but prefer to listen instead of talking	25.5%	
	C. not confident to converse with foreign teachers because of poor English	72.4%	
Whether learning English is fun	A. yes	7.6%	*English activities can be more varied, teaching models can be improved so that students can be more interested.
	B. sometimes	49%	
	C. not at all	43.4%	
English learning methods	A. prefer to practise by myself	64.8%	*The interaction between teachers and students, students and students should be increased; *Teachers control more because we (students) are not so self-disciplined.
	B. prefer to practise in a group	28.3%	
	C. prefer to listen to teachers instead of thinking independently	6.9%	
Autonomy in English learning	A. able to make choices about what to learn and learn actively	8.3%	*More freedom can be allowed
	B. not able to control learning progress	64.6%	
	C. always unsure what to do and what to learn	26.1%	
Multi-media facilities	A. often use radio and intranet to learn English	13.8%	*More audio facilities are expected; *More free on-line English learning time can be provided; *More free English movies can be offered.
	B. sometimes use radio and intranet to learn English	35.9%	
	C. mostly play computer games and chat on line	50.3%	

One conclusion of this research was that the students' motivation for learning English mostly came from external pressure such as passing exams, obtaining a certificate and job-hunting. Amongst 400 university students, only 8% of the students in the survey enjoyed learning English. Hence, it seems that students were not really willing to learn the language autonomously. Their data also indicates conflicting facts between the expectation and the real performance of the students. 65% students expressed willingness to study by themselves, whilst only 7% preferred to listen to the teachers. However, 65% of the students still doubted their ability to learn autonomously and wished to be controlled by or at least to be pushed a little by the teachers. The outcomes were similar with regard to the facilities provided by the university. Students seemed to be inconsistent: they would like to have more chances to talk to native English teachers but they were not really willing to encourage in conversation because of their poor spoken English; they asked for more free access to learning via the Internet and opportunities to watch English movies, but 50% admitted that 'they spend most of their time online chatting and playing games' (Li and Qi, 2007:84).

◆ *Shanghai University*

Su (2004) describes two teaching-learning programmes experimentally employed in Shanghai University: the Reinforcement Training Programme and the Multi-media Training Programme (pp.247-253).

Reinforcement Training Programme

The Reinforcement Training Programme was introduced in 1997. The curriculum was designed particularly to develop learners' ability to study autonomously. During the two-year College English programme, there were only four class hours in each week with an extra two class hours for spoken English in the first term. Hence, the only way for students to complete the course and meet the requirements was to learn, with support and guidance from teachers, autonomously after class. The curriculum gave detailed instructions on teaching-learning materials, the venue for learning, class hours, precise

requirements for each term, and forms of test. The requirements were listed under sub-subjects: English reading, English literature reading, comprehensive English, English listening, audio-visual English, spoken English, and English writing. Figure 3.3 is an example of the requirements:

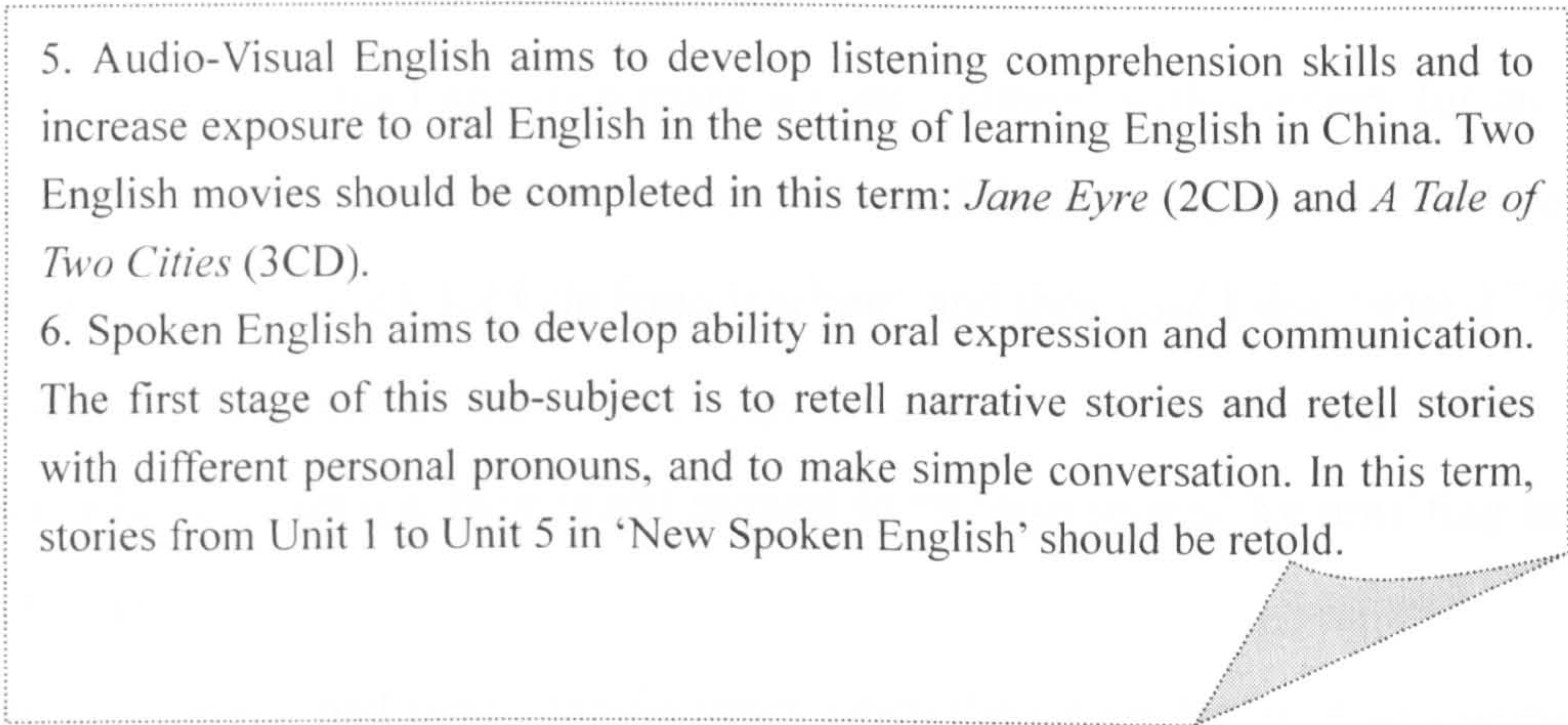


Figure 3.3 Part of the Curriculum for Reinforcement Training Programme (developed from Su 2004: 260, original in Chinese).

With all these compulsory tasks, learners were expected to organise their own time to achieve these goals. Table 3.9 shows the structure of the test for this programme:

Table 3.9 Test structure and contents for Reinforcement Training Programme (developed from Su 2004:249, original in Chinese)

Forms of Test	Sub-subjects	Test items	Scores
Exams and tests in daily class hours	Reading	English novels	10
	Writing	Writing in daily class hours	10
End-of-term oral test	Spoken English	English story retelling	10
End-of-term written test	Listening Comprehension	CET 4 listening	10
	Listening Comprehension	Specified tapes for the term	10
	Audio-Visual English	Specified movies for the term	10
	Intensive English	Texts and exercises studied during the term	15
	Reading	Materials studied during the term	5
		Unseen texts	5
	Writing	Writing objectives set for the term	15
Total			100

If we compare Figure 3.3 with the test items in Table 3.9, it is clear that the requirements of the curriculum were all tested (examples are shaded in Table 3.9). This is one of the measures to encourage students to learn the items taught. The programme also made use of another measure called ‘refreshing scores’. That is to say, if the learners had scored low during the daily class hours due to insufficient reading or ineffective reading, they were able to re-read and then make an appointment with teachers for an individual test so that they might ‘refresh’ their scores. Even if there were some obscure points in the novels, learners could ask for help from teachers, and they could also ‘refresh’ their scores after they had understood better with help. Similarly in writing, if the learners were not satisfied with their scores, they might request to ‘refresh scores’ by rewriting tasks before the end-of term tests.

The programme had lasted for six years when the research report was written and the outcomes had proved to be satisfactory. According to the researchers, the learners participating in the programme were outstanding in dealing with information of different kinds. Excellent reading ability enabled them to select swiftly from all the information provided and good writing supported their ability to deal with and use this information. In addition, they felt confident in their ability to communicate in different circumstances.

With these outcomes, it seemed that this was a successful trial for training learners in their first stage of learning, but it was not enough for further improvement. There were some weaknesses in the programme. The tests mostly focused on what the learners had already learned or known as they were taught during the term time; therefore, learners might not try or practise anything else, instead, they might just focus on repeating what they had already done during the term time for the purpose of high scores. For example, they might just need to rewrite a story and recite it. Such an activity would prove nothing about their ability to learn autonomously.

Multi-media Training Programme

Shanghai University introduced a Multi-media Training Programme in 2000. Three Teaching-Learning models were tried out:

✧ *Teacher Talk & Practice (M1).*

In class hours, teachers presented and explained the grammatical focuses using PowerPoint; at the same time, learners were involved in relevant activities or exercises for each text or each section. In addition, learners were invited to design PowerPoint presentations in groups.

✧ *Autonomous learning (M2).*

In class hours, teachers did not present or explain any grammatical focuses; instead, learners made use of computer facilities to learn, at their own pace, the required contents from CDs. Teachers were available to answer questions and to supervise learners' self-directed learning. Learners were required to write reports or outlines after class and teachers checked some of them. Mistakes and errors were marked but learners were required to correct themselves.

✧ *Teacher Talk (M3).*

Teachers designed detailed and informative PowerPoint presentations to display and explain difficult points and key points. Learners listened and read.

The research finding, based on research over a two-year period, was that M1 was the most effective model in that learners' test scores when using this model were higher than those of students using the other two models. M3 was the second most effective model and M2 was the least effective. This proves that multi-media facilities are helpful but should not be the only access to learning and it is suggested that learners do not rely solely on facilities. In M2, learners were put right in the centre of the learning process, but the fact was that not all of them knew how to study so most of them failed to learn effectively. This also proves the fact that teachers' instructions are supportive of learners' progress, even when learners are learning 'autonomously' at their own pace; teachers' suggestions also facilitate their achievement to a great extent.

General conclusions that can be drawn from this study are that advanced facilities can enhance successful learning but facilities are not sufficient for learning, at least in the Chinese context. Facilities cannot replace teachers and learning strategies can also influence the learning outcomes.

◆ *China University of Geosciences in Beijing*

A further example comes from China University of Geosciences in Beijing. Wei (2005) and his colleagues conducted this research at the initial stage of the Reform. The research plan was as follows:

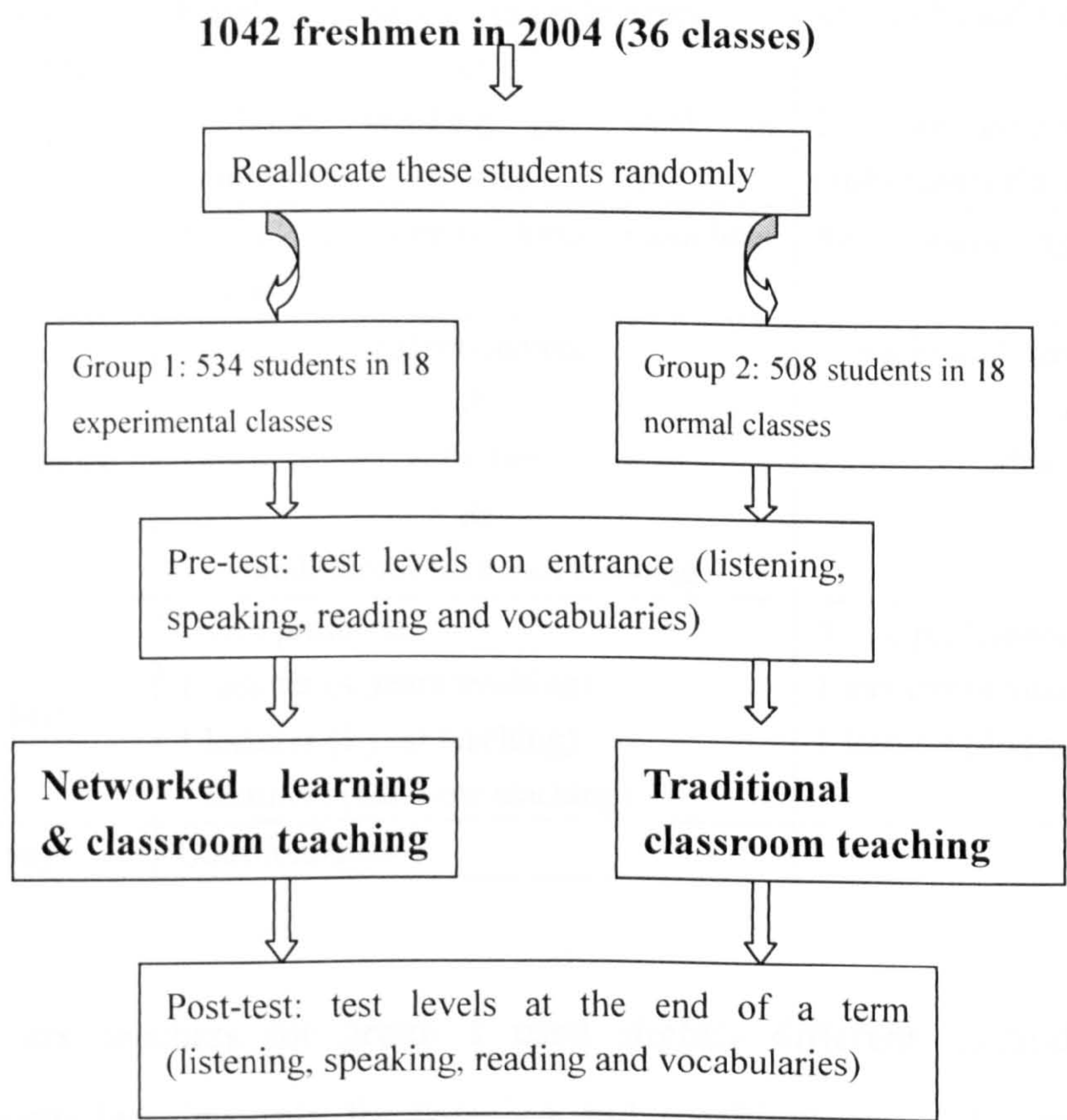


Figure 3.4 Comparative study of the effect of the Reform (developed from Wei, 2005: 225, original in Chinese)

At the beginning of their first term, students were randomly allocated into Group 1 (534 students) and Group 2 (508 students) and teachers volunteered to teach one group or the other. Pre-test and Post-test were used to compare students' performance; and questionnaires on the Reform were distributed to students in Group 1.

Differences between the programmes of the two groups are illustrated in Table 3.10:

Table 3.10 Comparing the programmes of the two groups

	Group 1 (Network learning & classroom teaching)	Group 2 (Traditional classroom teaching)
Learning mode & Teaching hours	16 weeks	16 weeks
	2 hours per week <i>autonomous learning</i> based on computer and the Internet & 2 hours <i>teaching</i> per week in multi-media classrooms	2 hours <i>teaching</i> per week in non-multimedia classrooms & 2 hours <i>teaching</i> per week in multi-media classrooms
Textbooks	<i>New College English intranet teaching system</i>	<i>New College English</i>
Teaching mode	student-centred & activities & traditional classroom teaching	traditional classroom teaching & discussion
Teachers	1 vice professor 1 lecturer (4 years teaching) 1 lecturer (1 year teaching) 3 lecturers (half year teaching)	4 vice professors 1 lecturer (4 years teaching) 1 lecturer (2 years teaching)
Survey	Questionnaires	

The six teachers for group 1 used slightly different methods: some employed autonomous learning only for listening and speaking; some also arranged autonomous time for reading and writing. That is to say, at least as far as listening and speaking were concerned, learners were all required to learn autonomously. An example of the approach to listening and speaking is as follows. Students were compulsorily required to study for two hours each week in the computer rooms with teachers present to supervise and answer questions. It was recommended that one unit should be finished in two hours, but the learners were able to progress at their own pace. If they could not finish a particular unit in two hours, they could complete it in the next two-hour slot, but within the sixteen weeks, they were required to finish at least ten units (there were sixteen units altogether).

When students had finished two units, they indicated this on the on-line Course Forum and waited to be tested. The tests were in two parts. Firstly, a group of four students were asked to prepare a dialogue relevant to the texts. For example, for the unit ‘Going on

Vacation’, the task was: *Make a phone call to a hotel in Zhu Hai City to obtain information concerning your stay there.* This activity tested how much students had learned from the unit and how well they could apply this to a realistic task.

The second part of the tests was to have a discussion in a group of four. For example, the task for the unit ‘Going on Vacation’ was: *In this unit you have learned about two types of holidaymakers; what are they? Which type do you prefer? Give your reasons.* During the first few discussions, students seemed too timid to talk, or perhaps had no idea what to say. Teachers then presented ideas on how to start conversations and how to deal with different situations. The outcomes revealed that students benefited a lot from teachers’ guidance and instruction.

Questionnaire data was collected and analysed as regards learners’ learning interest and participation; learners’ adaptation to the new teaching mode; the testing mode; the advantages of new teaching mode; the changed role of teachers; and the influence of the new Curriculum on listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The results of the survey are shown in Table 3.11:

Table 3.11: Research findings (excerpts) for Group 1 from China University of Geosciences in Beijing (developed from Wei, 2005: 236-240, original in Chinese)

Learners’ interest and participation	6% said this had increased greatly; 70% increased; 22% no change; 2% decreased
Learners’ adaptation to new teaching mode	48% felt they had adapted well; 38% could adapt; 8% could adapt with great effort; 5% could not adapt
Views of testing mode as reflection of learning effectiveness	37% preferred ‘traditional test + scores of autonomous learning’; 23% chose ‘traditional test + oral test’; 12% agreed on CET; 8% selected ‘oral test + writing’
Advantages of new teaching mode	57% felt this enhanced their ability to learn autonomously; 38% their all-round language ability; 5% their language output
Changed role of teachers	67% agreed that teachers talked less but in more depth; 20% thought teachers did not deal with the content so thoroughly; 10% did not see any change; 3% thought teachers did not talk at all.
Influence of the Reform on listening, speaking, reading and writing	The greatest benefit was felt to be for listening (68%) and speaking (30%); with a very small effect attributed to reading and writing (2%);

The research findings indicate that Group 1 learners were more active and more willing to learn; and multi-media facilities were supportive of learners’ autonomous learning and all-round competence. Of particular interest are the findings related to listening. Although students themselves felt that the new mode of teaching-learning was most effective in improving listening competence, comparison of the pre-test and post-test scores showed that students in Group 1 had performed less well in listening, whilst the scores of Group 2 were slightly higher than their pre-test scores. The researcher concludes that autonomous learning does not mean learning without teachers, on the contrary, teachers play an important role to help learners learn autonomously (Wei, 2005). This implies that autonomous learning in which learners learn at their own pace without control or supervision is not necessarily effective, and perhaps argues for some involvement of teachers in, for instance, providing instruction and advice on learning

strategies.

However, certain features of this study mean that these results should be treated with some caution. The research was carried out over only one term and the findings of a longer-term project might rather different, since students might naturally develop better learning skills. Besides, there was no data from observation to support conclusions from questionnaire analysis, which is one of the weaknesses of a comparative study. Moreover, teachers working with the experimental classes had not been specially trained for the purpose of the Reform, which means they might have used similar teaching methods to those in the control groups.

3.4 Conclusion

College English education has produced generations of graduates with a reasonable level of English in terms of grammatical knowledge and reading ability, but their ability to use English productively is comparatively weak. Therefore, the Ministry of Education launched the project ‘National English Teaching Reform’ in March 2003 and new College English Curriculum Teaching Requirements were issued in 2007.

This chapter has reported on a variety of implementation studies. It is evident that the Government, curriculum planners, and universities have made great efforts to implement the Reform. Huge investment has been made in self-access multi-media facilities, multi-media classrooms, textbook packages and software development.

Teachers have been required to switch from a traditional teaching mode (textbooks, chalk and blackboard) to multimedia-facilitated teaching with the Internet. Although there is evidence that they have been making more and more use of multi-media facilities in their teaching, progress has been slow because many teachers, as well as many students, have been used to traditional ways of teaching-learning. To judge by the research, learner autonomy, which is one of the important objectives of the Reform, has not yet been fully realised. Experience suggests that at the current stage what is proving to be most effective is limited autonomous learning integrated with traditional teaching modes. Competence in Listening Comprehension, investigated in some research, has not improved as a result of

multi-media facilitated autonomous learning, perhaps because of a lack of teachers' instruction on learning strategies.

Learners have benefited, more or less, in both language knowledge learning and skill development from learning with multi-media facilities. However, the availability of multi-media facilities is still insufficient to meet learner demand. Software and intranets need to be improved to guarantee more stable running and to meet the requirements of application in different universities for different learners. At the same time, teachers and students must learn how to better operate the facilities in order to take full advantage of these facilities.

The focus of the CET test has switched from linguistic knowledge to all-round ability, and the washback effect has encouraged the development of all-round competence, but test-orientated teaching-learning still persists to some extent because of established habits of English teaching-learning in China.

There have been many research studies on the Reform since 2003, though the focus of these has varied slightly in different periods. For example, in 2003, articles mostly reviewed the English teaching and learning problems following the introduction of the Reform (eg. Jia, 2003; Hua, 2003; and Zhang, 2003b). In 2004, some articles commented on the new teaching models and new textbooks (eg. Xia, Lv and Wei, 2004; Zhang and Luo, 2004; and Gui, 2004). In 2005 and 2006, articles started to appear on the effectiveness and influence of the Reform (eg. Cui, 2005; Jia, 2006a; and Jia, 2006b).

Many of the studies discussed in the chapter were carried out shortly after the introduction of the Reform, and their findings have provided valuable insights for further implementation. In the succeeding years, a number of improvements have no doubt been carried out and changes have taken place in both teachers and learners and research continues. Among more recent research studies, Gu and Zhang (2008) explore the opportunities and challenges the National English Reform faces and the assumptions and expectations of the integration of the Net into foreign language learning. Other researchers also give their attention to further development (see e.g. Gu, 2007; Mao, 2007; and Lin, 2008). The situation is still changing, however, and further research is needed to shed light on the progress that has been made.

With regard to the research focus, there is no detailed description of Listening Comprehension in many researchers’ studies. For example, Wei (2005) did not offer details of how learners have improved their listening competence after the introduction of the Reform. Moreover, as indicated in earlier parts of this chapter, much of the research that has been carried out has certain methodological limitations (see Table 3.12).

Table 3.12 Examples of research methods in evaluating the Reform

	Research on Autonomous Learning	Research on Multi-media Facilities & the Internet	Research on Textbooks
Questionnaires	Wang (2005); He and Zhong (2007); Lin (2008); Ma and Meng (2008)	Li (2005b); Liu <i>et al.</i> (2005); Xiao and Guo (2006); Liu and Kong (2008)	Lou (2005); Ying (2005); Zhou (2008)
Interviews	Lin (2008); Ma and Meng (2008)	Liu <i>et al.</i> (2005)	Lou (2005); Zhou (2008)
Observations			
Experimental case study		Li (2005b); Gu (2007); Liu and Kong (2008)	Ying (2005);
Testing	Wang (2005);	Li (2005b); Gong and Zhu (2006); Xiao and Guo (2006); Liu and Kong (2008)	Lou (2005); Ying (2005)
Document study	Zhu (2005); Chen (2006); Jia (2006b)	Li (2005a); Mao (2007); Peng and He (2007)	Ying (2005); Xia (2008)

The table indicates that questionnaires were the most frequently used method and testing was also widely used; though none of the research claimed to have used data from observation. As far as the integrated research is concerned, researchers such as Li and Qi (2007), for instance, employed questionnaires without interviewing teachers or students; and others, such as Wei (2005), used experimental case studies without data from observation. Most research has been carried out within a single university. Therefore, the following chapter describes a study which used triangulated methods in order to arrive at a more complete understanding of the Reform in a particular university and from informants in a secondary research site in order to understand how these processes might differ in institutions of different status.

CHAPTER 4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter describes and offers a rationale for the research methodology adopted in this study. Sections 4.2 - 4.4 present the research questions, research paradigm and the conceptual framework. Key features of the research design (context, participants) are introduced and methods of data analysis briefly explained. Finally, measures used to ensure the reliability, validity and objectivity of the study are presented.

4.2 Research Questions

As discussed in Chapter 1, the background of the research is the Reform on National English Teaching at college level in China. This set a new target for college English teaching to develop all-round ability, especially listening and speaking. It also recommended a combination of classroom teaching and student self-study via CWISs (Campus-Wide Information Systems). Moreover, the Reform emphasises the importance of students' learning autonomously and communicating across cultures.

The focus of the research is the implementation of this Reform in a particular institution with reference to such issues as how the university has adjusted to the English teaching and how far it has reached; hence, the research questions are as follows:

- Q1. What have the University authorities done to ensure implementation of the Reform?
- Q2. To what extent have the changes in teaching-learning of English intended by the Reform been implemented with particular reference to teaching-learning of Listening Comprehension?
- Q3. What use is made of the multi-media facilities by students and teachers to improve students' Listening Comprehension?
- Q4. What obstacles to the implementation of the Reform, if any, have emerged? To what extent could these have been anticipated?

4.3 Research Paradigm

A paradigm is a way of looking at the world that is based on certain philosophical assumptions which guide and direct thinking and action. In Guba's words, it is 'a Net that contains the researcher's ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions' (Guba, 1990:17). It 'represents 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 that world and its parts, as, for example, cosmologies and theologies do' (Guba & Lincoln, 1994:105). For Burrell and Morgan (1979), there exist four sets of assumptions:

1. The ontological assumptions. These are assumptions which concern the very nature or essence of the social phenomena being investigated.
2. The epistemological assumptions. These concern the very bases of knowledge; its nature and forms, how it can be acquired, and how it is communicated to other human beings.
3. The assumptions of models of human beings. This third category of assumptions concern human nature, and in particular the relationship between human beings and their environment. Since the human being is both the subject and object of study, the consequences for social science of assumptions of this kind are indeed far-reaching.
4. The methodological assumptions. The contrasting ontology, epistemologies and models of human beings will in turn demand different research methods.

(Burrell and Morgan, 1979: 1-3)

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) categorise the paradigms as positivist and anti-positivist. They introduce two terms: the 'normative' and 'interpretive' paradigms. Whereas normative studies are positivist, all theories constructed within the context of the interpretive paradigm tend to be anti-positivist (p.22). In relation to the latter, Denzin and Lincoln (2003) argue that all research is interpretive since it is under the guidance of a set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied. At the most general level, four major interpretive paradigms structure qualitative research: positivist and post-positivist, constructivist-interpretive, critical, and feminist-post-structural (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). This research has been conducted within a constructivist interpretive paradigm. Hence, the discussion focuses mainly on the constructivist-interpretive paradigm.

Mertens (1998) sums up the answers to the paradigm-defining questions for the constructivist-interpretive approach as follows:

- *The ontological assumptions:* Reality is socially constructed, thus, multiple mental constructions can be apprehended, and perceptions of reality may change throughout the process of the study.
- *The epistemological assumptions:* The enquirer and the inquired-into are interlocked in an interactive process; each influences the other.
- *The methodological assumptions:* The predominant methods in this paradigm, such as interviews, observations, and document reviews, are mostly qualitative.

(Mertens, 1998: 11)

Guba & Lincoln (1994) present these assumptions in an order that reflects a logical primacy:

1. Ontologically, what is the form and nature of reality and what is there that can be known about it?
2. Epistemologically, what is the nature of the relationship between the knower or would-be knower and what can be known?
3. And methodologically, how can the inquirer (would-be knower) go about finding out whatever he or she believes can be known? The methodological question cannot be reduced to a question of methods; methods must be fitted to a predetermined methodology.

(Guba & Lincoln, 1994: 108)

The basic assumptions guiding the constructivist-interpretive paradigm, as defined by Schwandt (1994), are that 'knowledge is socially constructed by people active in the research process, and researchers should attempt to understand the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live in it' (p.118). In a later article, Schwandt (2003) argues that from an interpretivist's point of view, human action and social action are 'inherently meaningful' (p.296). Habermas (1984) describes the interpretive paradigms as 'double hermeneutic, where people strive to interpret and operate in an already interpreted world' (p.109-110).

My study on the Reform of National English Teaching was interpretive research. Ontologically, the Reform of National English Teaching was implemented as required in most universities in China. Epistemologically, the implementation required understanding,

cooperation and support from the universities, the teachers and the students. Thus, their reactions, and the extent to which they were prepared to adapt were of the utmost importance to the success of the Reform. At the same time, the Reform stimulated a shift within English learning from reading to listening and speaking. Methodologically, the research adopted a mixed approach using both quantitative and qualitative research methods: questionnaires, interviews, classroom observations, and document review.

4.4 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual context of a study is ‘a system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that support and inform the research’ (Maxwell 1998:77). This context, or a diagrammatic representation of it, is often called a ‘conceptual framework’ (Hedrick, Bickman, and Rog, 1993; Robson, 1993; and Miles and Huberman, 1994). Miles and Huberman (1994) state that a conceptual framework ‘explains, either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied - the key factors, concepts, or variables - and the presumed relationships among them’ (p.18).

Thus the conceptual context is a formulation of what the researcher thinks is going on with the phenomena he or she is studying; a tentative theory of what is happening. Becker (1986) systematically developed the idea that prior work provides ‘modules’ that the researcher can use in building the conceptual context, modules that the researcher needs to examine critically to ensure they work effectively with the rest of the design.

The framework for this research is shown in Figure 4.1.

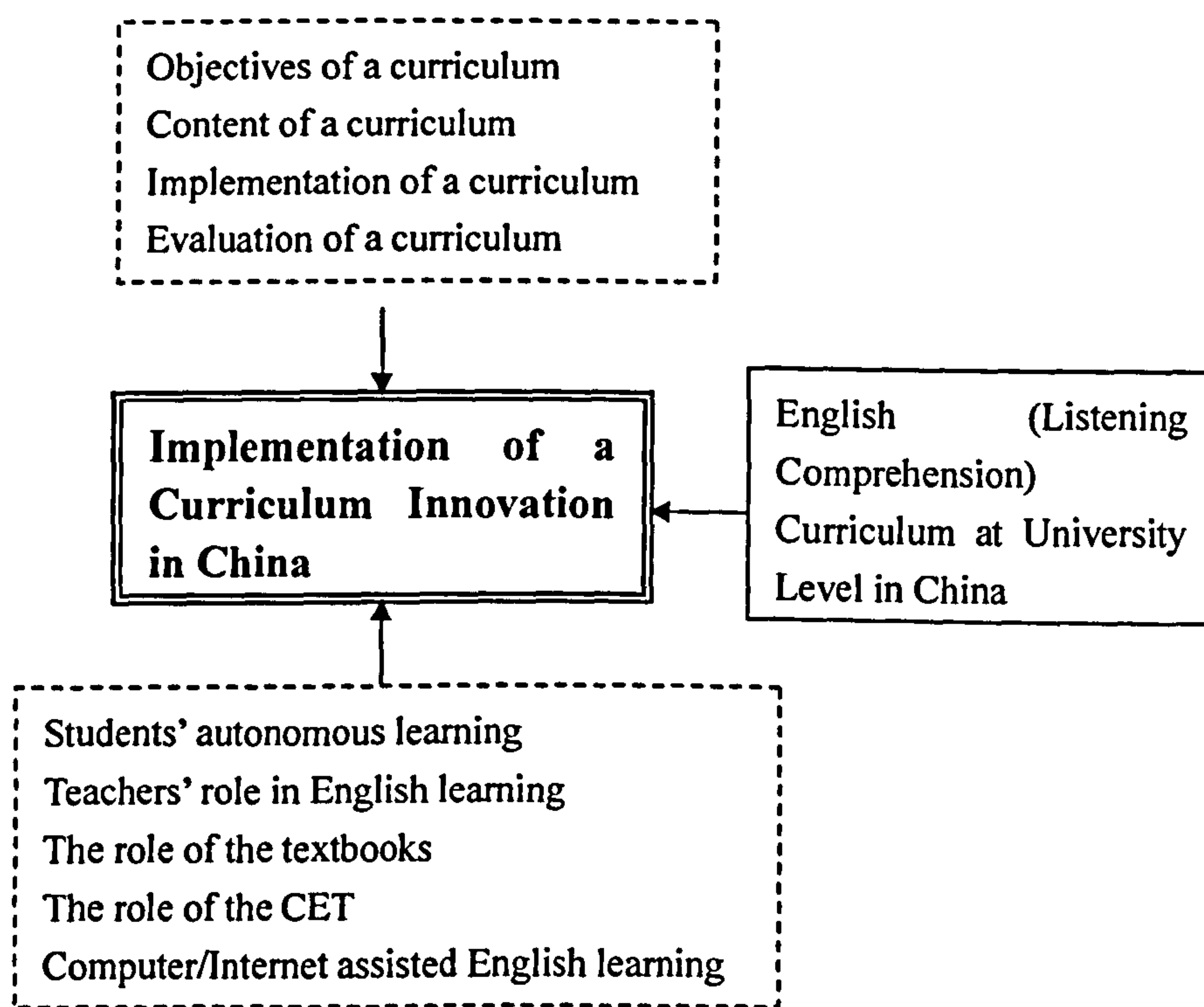


Figure 4.1 Conceptual Framework of this research

4.5 Research Design

In educational studies, quantitative and qualitative studies are used for different purposes. Denzin & Lincoln (2003) define qualitative research as: 'a situated activity that locates the observer in the world; it consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible' (p.3). That is to say, the settings are natural; the places for research are those places where everyday experiences take place. As regards quantitative research, this explains 'phenomena by collecting numerical data that is analysed using mathematically based methods (statistics in particular)' (Creswell, 1994:1). On the one hand, quantitative methods can 'establish the degree to which perceptions are shared, but uncovering the perceptions themselves must first be done naturalistically' (Gray and Costello, 1987:12). On the other hand, qualitative research often produces surprises and new insights (Bryman, 2006).

The design I adopted was a mixed mode design using both quantitative and qualitative

research methods. Quantitative data was elicited from questionnaires, whilst qualitative data was collected from semi-structured interviews with College English teachers, key individuals in the Reform and one technician; group interviews with students; and semi-structured classroom observations. The interview and classroom observation data was used not only to support and clarify evidence from the questionnaires, thereby providing for triangulation, but it also stimulated informants to think more deeply about their own practice.

The choice of an appropriate research context and participants are two key factors of successful research. The sampling strategy is therefore of utmost importance to the quality of a piece of research. In relation to the process of selection, Cohen *et al.* (2000) argue that judgements have to be made about four key factors (pp.98-99):

1. The sample size. There is no clear-cut answer as to how large the research samples should be as the appropriate sample size depends on the purpose of the study, the nature of the population under scrutiny, specific research approach, and the desired degree of statistical significance in the findings. As stated by Mertens (1998), it is easier to obtain statistical significance with a larger sample, but this means the research is more costly. Thus, it is important to know the size of the smallest sample that is still 'sensitive enough to detect a statistically significant difference' (p.272).
2. The representativeness and parameters of the sample. If it is to be a valid sample, it is essential to consider the extent to which the sample represents the whole population in question.
3. Access to the sample. Access is not only permitted, but also practicable.
4. The sampling strategy to be used. Two main methods of sampling are 'probability sample (also known as a random sample)' and 'non-probability sample (also known as a purposive sample)'.

A probability sample attempts to eliminate the judgment or bias of the researcher and seeks to represent the wider population beyond the sample surveyed by generalising from the research, whilst a non-probability sample only seeks to represent a particular group or

a particular named section of the wider population. (See Morrison, 1993; and Cohen *et al.*, 2000) This research adopted a purposive sampling strategy, which is one type of non-probability sampling. The choice of my own university (University S) as the location of this research might be regarded as convenience sampling because I have been an English teacher for more than ten years at this university. A convenience sample is a group of individuals who (conveniently) are available for study. But I still chose them as a 'purposeful sample' because this was not the only university accessible to me. As noted by Cohen *et al.* (2000), researchers 'handpick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgment of their typicality' (p.103), and University S was chosen because it was also representative in a number of aspects (see 4.5.1, below).

4.5.1 *The context*

University S is a medium-sized university (around 10,000 students) located in the capital of Z province in eastern China and is quite close to the city of Shanghai, a well-developed metropolis. Owing to the frequency of international events in this area, the municipal government attaches much importance to English language teaching. More than twenty universities and colleges are located in the city.

According to the admission system of Chinese universities, there are five stages in the undergraduate recruitment process. After the nationwide Entrance Examination in June each year, the first stage is for the 'first level' (i.e. the most prestigious) universities to choose their students. After the best students are selected by those universities, the second level universities choose theirs. The students selected during the first, second and third stages are all eligible to do BA degrees. The students selected in the fourth and fifth stages are eligible only for lower-level associate degrees. University S is entitled to recruit students in the third, fourth and fifth stages. The students are expected to obtain either four-year BA degrees or three-year associate degrees. This research focused on the four-year BA students because the Reform focuses particularly on the English programme for this group. The scores in the Entrance Examination of the four-year students were average for the country as a whole, which meant the students in this university could also

be considered to be average in their all-round knowledge. The admission process also set requirements in terms of the students’ English scores; hence, their English proficiency was considered to be adequate for entry to the university.

The students were allocated into different faculties according to their majors, but for the purpose of the College English courses, most of the non-English-major students were allocated into Level A classes and Level B classes according to their English scores in the Entrance Examination. The students in Level A classes had higher English scores than those in Level B. For example, there were 200 students majoring in Marketing who were divided into four classes. When they attended the College English courses, 98 students with higher English scores were in two Level A classes and 102 with lower English scores in two Level B Classes. For all other courses, they stayed within their own class. Since there were relatively few Level A students in some small faculties, such as Science or Engineering, these students remained in their own classes, which were level B by default. The differences between Level A and Level B are shown as Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: The differences between Level A and Level B at University S

	Level A	Level B
Level of English scores when admitted to the university	Higher	Comparatively lower
Vocabulary (the number of words to be acquired after four semesters)	6400	4800
Teaching focus	Listening and speaking	Basic language knowledge
The right to use the Interactive-Computer rooms	Yes	No
The evaluation of students’ English achievements	Scores on paper-based test & scores on Intranet exercises	Scores on paper-based test & scores on Listening Comprehension test

The University set different English teaching requirements for different levels. The teaching schedule remained the same but different aspects were emphasised. For Level B students, the emphasis was on basic language knowledge, such as vocabulary development and accuracy of writing. For Level A students, there was more emphasis on fluency of speech. The teachers might spend more time focusing on the textbooks for Level B students whilst Level A students might spend more time practising listening and speaking. Another very important difference was that: Level A students were allowed to make use of the Interactive-Computer rooms on campus, but Level B students were not. The University authorities insisted that the limited facilities can only guarantee sufficient practice for part of the student body, so they made the decision to offer the opportunity to Level A students. If all the students were permitted to use the Interactive-Computer system, the system would collapse immediately. There was no big difference in instruction language for Level A and Level B students, though there might be some distinction due to different teachers. In general, Chinese was used in situations when teachers judged that understanding instructions was more important than the language of input, whilst English was used for routine or familiar instructions such as ‘Let’s listen again’ and ‘Any volunteers to answer this question?’

4.5.2 The participants

The participants in this study were 227 (117 Level A and 110 Level B) non-English majors in the first or second year of a four-year BA programme, 20 teachers and one technician. There were also two key individuals involved in the Reform from University Z, a higher level university.

The study took place in the second semester of the academic year 2007-8. 82 students were in their first year and 145 students in their second year. All had been learning English as a foreign language for at least six years (more than 1000 classroom hours) before entering university. Fifteen volunteers were divided into five groups for the purpose of group interviews. The criteria for selecting informants will be outlined in section 4.6.2.

There are both full-time and part-time English teachers in the University. Considering the fact that the part-time English teachers only come to the University when they have courses to give and they might have much less communication with the students or other teachers, this research only included the full-time teachers. Half of the 40 full-time teachers only taught English majors. The remaining teachers deliver the College English course to students of various majors in the whole university. Among the latter teachers, only one is male. These 20 College English teachers were the focus of the research.

4.5.3 Research instruments

To answer the research questions listed in section 4.2, the research applied both quantitative and qualitative methods, namely, questionnaires, individual interviews and group interviews, observations, and document review. These applications followed Eichelberger's (1989) argument that interpretive researchers do a great deal of observation, read documents produced by members of the groups being studied, do extensive formal and informal interviewing, and develop classifications and descriptions that represent the beliefs of the various groups. Guba & Lincoln (1994) also argue that in correspondence with assumptions about the social construction of reality, research can be conducted only through interaction between and among investigator and respondents. The combination of instruments used for data collection in this research is discussed in this section.

Questionnaires

The questionnaire is a useful instrument to collect structured and numerical data. An ideal questionnaire 'possesses the same properties as a good law' (Cohen & Manion 1994:92). Cohen *et al.* (2000) conclude that the questionnaire should:

'be clear on its purposes; be clear on what needs to be included or covered in the questionnaire in order to meet the purposes; be exhaustive in its coverage of the elements of inclusion; ask the most appropriate kinds of questions to answer the research purposes and sub-questions; ask for empirical data.'

(Cohen *et al.*, 2000: 247)

The items in questionnaires can be closed or open-ended. Wilson and McLean (1994) argue that closed questions are generally quick to complete, straightforward to code, and ‘do not discriminate unduly on the basis of how articulate the respondents are’ (p.24). Highly structured, closed questions are useful in that ‘they can generate frequencies of response amenable to statistical treatment and analysis, and they also enable comparisons to be made across groups in the sample’ (Oppenheim, 1992:115), though closed questions also have limitations. Oppenheim (1992) also points out that closed questions do not enable the respondents to add any remarks, qualifications and explanations to the categories, thus, ‘the categories might not be exhaustive’ (p.115). On the other hand, open questions enable respondents to write a free response in their own words to avoid the limitations of pre-set categories, though it might take more time to answer and some respondents may ignore the open questions.

If a closed and structured questionnaire is to be used to enable patterns to be observed and comparisons to be made, Cohen *et al.* (2000) argue that the questionnaire will need to be piloted and refined so that the final version contains as full a range of possible responses as can be reasonably foreseen. A pilot has several functions, principally to increase the reliability, validity and practicability of the questionnaire (Wilson and McLean, 1994:47). It serves:

- to check the clarity of the questionnaire items, instructions and layout;
- to gain feedback on the validity of the questionnaire items, the operationalization of the constructs and the purposes of the research;
- to eliminate ambiguities or difficulties in wording;
- to gain feedback on the type of question and its format;
- to gain feedback on response categories for closed questions, and for the appropriateness of specific questions or stems of questions;
- to gain feedback on the attractiveness and appearance of the questionnaire;
- to gain feedback on the layout, sectionalising, numbering and itemisation of the questionnaire;
- to check the time taken to complete the questionnaire;
- to check whether the questionnaire is too long or too short, too easy or too difficult, too disengaging, too threatening, too intrusive and too offensive;
- to generate categories from open-ended responses to use as categories for closed response-modes;
- to identify redundant questions;
- to identify commonly misunderstood or non-completed items;

- to try out the coding / classification system for data analysis.

(Cohen *et al.*, 2000: 260)

The use of questionnaires in the pilot study and the main research will be discussed in 4.6.

Classroom observations

Observational data offers the opportunity for the researcher to ‘look at what is taking place *in situ* rather than reviewing second hand data’ (Patton, 1990:203). Cohen *et al.* (2000) also point out that observation enables researchers to understand the context of progress, to be open-ended and inductive, to see things that might otherwise be unconsciously missed, and to discover things that participants might not freely talk about in interview situations. Many people believe that entirely avoiding researcher influence on subjects is an idealistic improbability (Adler & Adler, 1987; Jarvie, 1969; and Johnson, 1975), yet Adler & Adler (1994) argue that one great strength of the observational method ‘lies in the ease through which researchers can gain an entrée to settings’ (p.382). They also point to another great strength of observational method when combined with other methods. They argue that researchers’ observations of their settings and subjects are especially valuable for enhancing cross-checking or triangulation (Denzin, 1989) with information gathered through other means.

Observations can be well structured or unstructured depending on what the researcher has in mind and what they have prepared before they start to observe (Cohen *et al.*, 2000).

- A highly structured observation has its observation subjects and purposes planned in advance. A structured observation is very systematic and the resulting numerical data offers comparisons between settings and situations, and frequencies.
- A semi-structured observation has an agenda of issues but in a far less pre-determined or systematic manner.
- An unstructured observation is far less clear on what it is looking for. The observer

goes into a situation and observes what is going on before making any decisions on its significance to the research.

Structured observation requires preparation in advance, but the data analysis is fairly rapid. Whilst the less structured or unstructured observation is quicker to prepare, the data takes much longer to analyse. The former is used to test some hypothesis, whereas the latter will review observational data to elicit features of or explanation for the phenomena being observed (Robson, 1993; and Gillham, 2008).

As stated by Adler & Adler (1987, 1994), observations can be classified as non-participant observations or participant observations. Observers may have more time and opportunities to make notes while doing non-participant observations. Comparatively, participant observers may be involved more in what they are observing but have less opportunity to write down what they feel or what they notice. Observations can be overt or covert depending on whether the subjects know they are being observed and the level of involvement of the observer. Covert observation may cause ethical problems, whilst overt observations may affect the reliability of the data collection because the participants may behave differently because of the presence of the observers.

What do observers observe? Observation can focus on, for example, programme setting; the human and social environment; programme activities and participant behaviours; informal interactions and unplanned activities; nonverbal communication; unobtrusive measures; and observing what does not happen (Cohen *et al.*, 2000).

The application of classroom observations in my research will be discussed in 4.6.

Interviews

Interviewing is one of the most common ways to understand people and their behaviour. The research interview has been defined as ‘a two-person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information, and focused by him / her on content specified by research objectives of systematic description, prediction, or explanation’ (Cannell & Kahn, 1968:527).

Interviews offer 'an authentic gaze into the soul of another' (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997:305). Benney & Hughes (1956) argue that in interviewing interaction, 'both parties behave as though they are of equal status for its duration, whether or not this is actually so' (p.142). Kvale (1996) also remarks that an interview is an interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest and 'sees the centrality of human interaction for knowledge production' (p.11).

Cohen & Manion (1994) argue that as a distinctive research technique, the interview may serve three purposes:

1. It may be used as the principal means of gathering information having direct bearing on the research objectives. The interview provides access to what a person knows, what a person likes or dislikes, and what a person thinks.
2. It may be used to test hypotheses or to suggest new ones or as an explanatory device to help identify variables and relationships.
3. The interview may be used in conjunction with other methods in a research undertaking.

(Cohen & Manion, 1994: 273)

Interviews can be structured or unstructured. In structured interviewing, the interviewer asks all the respondents the same series of pre-established questions with a limited set of response categories. There is generally little room for variation in response, and the interviewer records the responses according to a coding scheme that has already been established. However, even in the most structured interview situation, not every contingency can be anticipated and not every interviewee behaves according to the script. Unstructured interviewing, therefore, can provide 'greater breadth' (Fontana & Frey, 2005:701-705). As regards the degree of structure, interviews can be categorised into: structured (fixed-response), semi-structured and open-ended (Mertens, 1998; Wellington, 2000; and Freebody, 2003). Freebody (2003) points out, 'in the open-ended interviews, only a few highly general questions or issues are put to the interviewee who is free to answer and direct the talk; whilst the semi-structured interviews begin with a predetermined set of questions, but allow some latitude in the breadth of relevance' (p.133).

The interview is primarily used as a source of information. Wellington (2000) argues

that the purpose of a research interview is to probe the informants' views and perspectives (p.72). As an information-gathering tool, interviews are used alongside other methods as a way of supplementing, adding detail and adding depth (Denscombe, 1998).

Interviews can also involve an individual or a group. The one-to-one interview, which involves a meeting only between one researcher and one informant, is relatively easy to arrange. Furthermore, it is straightforward and focuses on one specific person at one time. The group interview, which is often quicker than individual interviews, relies on the systematic questioning of several individuals simultaneously in a formal or informal setting. Group interviews 'can generate a wider range of responses and can aid the respondents' recall or stimulate embellished descriptions of specific events or experiences shared by members of the group' (Fontana & Frey, 2005:704). Watts & Ebbutt (1987) see group interviewing as providing the opportunity for discussions to develop, thus yielding a wide range of responses. They explain, 'such interviews are useful... where a group of people have been working together for some time or common purpose, or where it is seen as important that everyone concerned is aware of what others in the group are saying' (op. cit:27).

In this research, interviews were used firstly as a source of information, and secondly by way of triangulation with quantitative data elicited from the questionnaires. The application of individual and group interviews in my study will be discussed as part of the main research in 4.6.

Documentary research

Questionnaires, classroom observations and interviews are categorized as 'primary sources of data' whereas documents are considered to be 'secondary sources' (Wellington, 2000:108). Documents may include books, journals, official statistics, syllabuses, curriculum documents, inspectors' reports, newsletters, policy documents, leaflets, and so on.

To some extent, every study involves documentary research, even when it is only employed in a literature review. Wellington (2000) categorizes stages of using documents

in educational research (p.109):

- The exploratory stage: the research questions can be raised or the research hypotheses can be created with documentary research that opens up the area of inquiry. Angell and Freedman (1953) argue that expressive documents are generally used in the exploratory stage; the researchers familiarise themselves with the situation under scrutiny by carefully reading the documents (p.306).
- The complementary stage: documents can be valuable throughout the whole research process because they can serve as a complement to other research instruments.
- The concluding stage: the documents may be valuable to evaluate the researchers' own study as to how it relates to existing published material. They can also be valuable to enrich the final process of recording the research.

(Wellington, 2000: 109)

Some advantages of documentary research are suggested by Denscombe (1998): firstly, most researchers are able to get access to the sources relatively easily and with little expense; secondly, documentary research is a cost-effective method of collecting data; and thirdly, documents generally provide data that is permanent and available in a form which can be checked by others, thus, the data is open to public scrutiny.

4.5.4 Triangulation

Exclusive reliance on one method may bias or distort the researcher's picture of the particular aspect of reality he or she is investigating (Cohen & Manion, 1994:234). Therefore, confidence can be achieved when different methods of data collection substantially elicit the same results; further, the more the methods contrast with each other, the greater the confidence will be. Cohen & Manion (1994) define triangulation as 'the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour' (p.233). The core premise of triangulation is that all research methods have limitations and inherent bias (Greene, Caracelli and Graham, 1989: 256). Triangular techniques in the social sciences attempt to 'map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint and by making use of both quantitative and qualitative data.

Denzin (1989) distinguishes between several types of triangulation: data triangulation,

theory triangulation, investigator triangulation, methodological triangulation and multiple triangulation. Cohen & Manion (1994) explain the principal types of triangulation based on Denzin's typology:

- *Time triangulation* makes use of either cross-sectional or longitudinal approaches. Cross-sectional studies collect data from different groups at one point in time; longitudinal studies collect data from the same group at different points in time.
- *Space triangulation* intends to overcome the limitations of studies conducted within one culture or subculture.
- *Combined levels of triangulation* use more than one level of analysis from the three principal levels used in the social sciences, namely, the individual level, the interactive level (groups), and the level of collectivities (organizational, cultural or societal).
- *Theoretical triangulation* draws upon alternative or competing theories instead of utilizing one viewpoint only.
- *Investigator triangulation* includes more than one researcher.
- *Methodological triangulation* uses either (a) the same method on different occasions, or (b) different methods on the same object of study.

(Cohen & Manion, 1994: 236)

My research included time (cross-sectional) triangulation, theoretical triangulation and methodological triangulation. The questionnaires, classroom observations and interviews with the students were administered with different groups of students and teacher sample at the same period in time. In addition, documentary research provided a broad view on theories from a range of researchers. Furthermore, a mixed method approach using both qualitative and quantitative methods (questionnaires, classroom observations, interviews, document reviews) was employed in the research.

The next section describes the nature of the pilot study and the design of the main research.

4.6 Phases of the Research

4.6.1 Pilot study

Borg and Gall (1979) argue that a trial of research instruments and techniques is essential to a sound research plan. The major purpose of the pilot study was to trial certain

aspects of the research design and to check whether it was fit for purpose, and to obtain access for the main phase of research data collection. In this section, the pilot study carried out in April 2007 is introduced (see Figure 4.2).

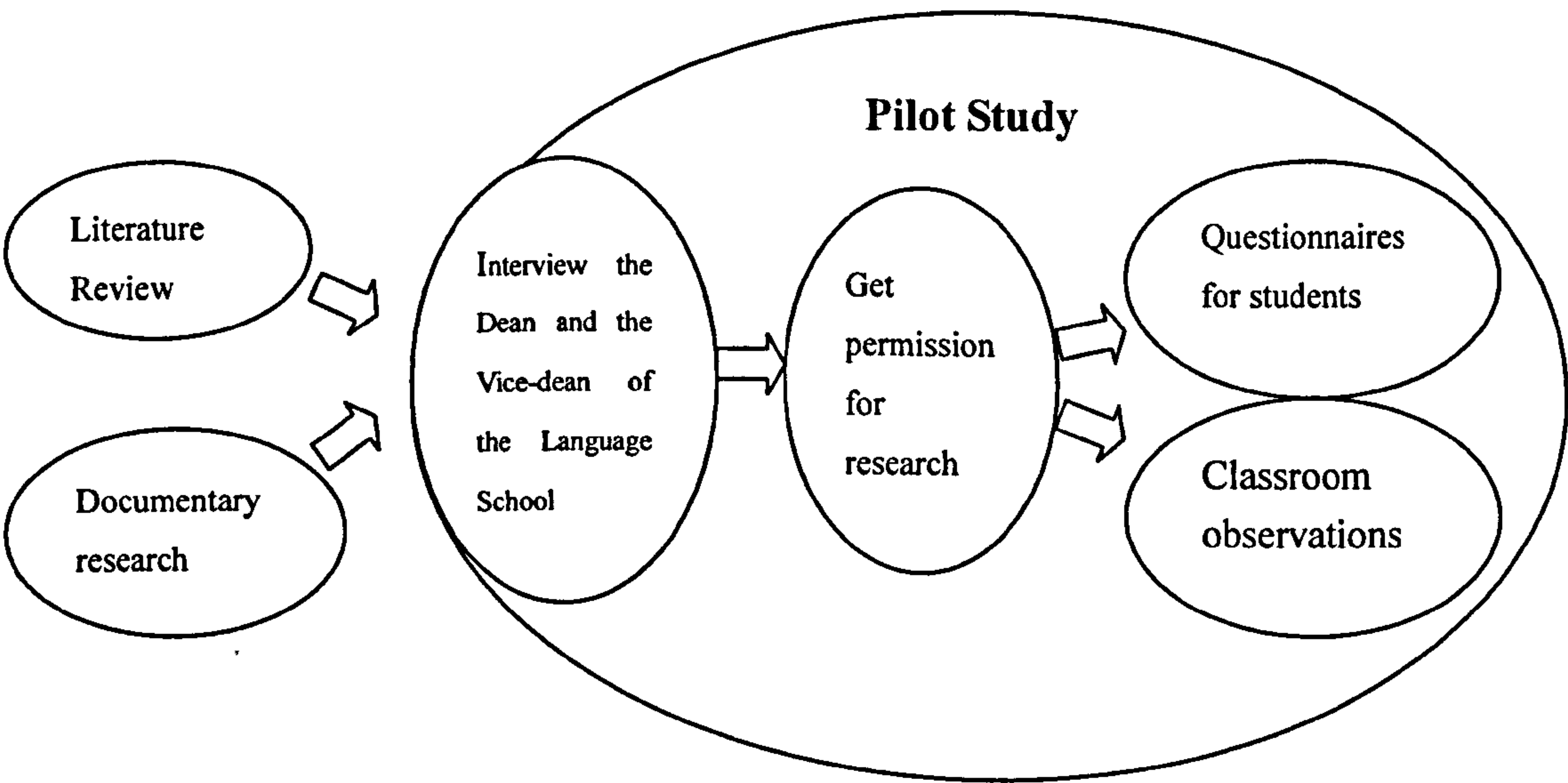


Figure 4.2 Pilot study design

The pilot study took place over a period of three weeks (April 2007) in China. I went back to University S, where I had been teaching English for more than ten years. I was quite familiar with most of the English teachers; at the same time, I was also familiar with the teaching policies and the process in the University. Therefore, access was not problematic and all participants showed a readiness to cooperate in the research.

Literature review and documentary research

The emphasis of literature review and documentary research prior to this stage had been on the background of the Reform, and this had guided the design of questionnaires and interviews. At the same time, the literature review and documentary research also provided reference for classroom observations.

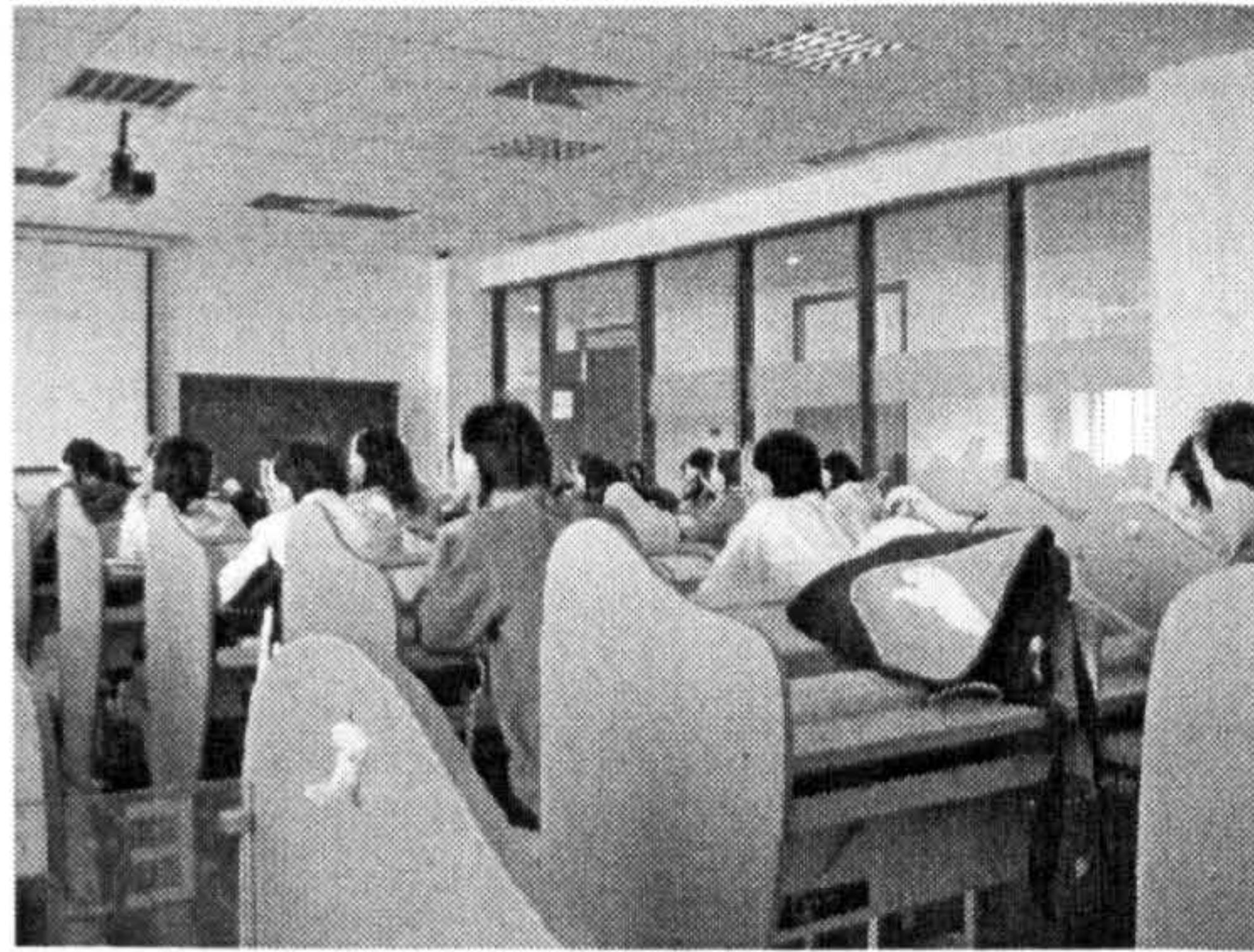
Interviews

During the first week, the Dean and the Vice Dean of the Language School were interviewed. One of the purposes of these interviews was to obtain a general profile of College English teaching in the University. The informants stated that as the focus of the National English Teaching Reform was on 'student-centred' learning instead of the previous 'teacher-centred' teaching, the University had improved the facilities in the library and the computer rooms to support students' learning and the students were being encouraged to learn autonomously by means of multi-media learning materials, both in class and outside class. The teachers had also been trained to make use of all the facilities and software.

The other purpose of the interviews was to seek permission to conduct research with the teachers and the students. The deans were very supportive and pilot data was subsequently collected as planned.

Classroom observations

Two Listening Comprehension classes were observed during the second week. In advance of this, following School of Education ethics procedures, I had obtained the permission of the teachers and the students, all of whom read the Information Sheet and signed the Consent Forms. The classes were recorded using an mp3 recorder. I checked the best position for the mp3 recorder in order to get the best audio quality. Due to the fact that all the students were using earphones and microphones during the class, I put the mp3 recorder next to one earphone and turned the volume to the maximum. The conversations between teacher and students, and between student and student were all clearly audible. In addition to the mp3 audio recording, I also took digital photographs of the classrooms both before the classes and while classes were in session. The photographs of the empty classrooms served as a helpful reminder to me of all the facilities; and the pictures of the classes in session were also an informative record.



Clip 4.1 An empty classroom and a class in session

These pilot observations allowed me to check the necessary steps for future field work and data collection. For example, the time for entering the classroom should be early enough to allow me to choose the best location for observation. If I entered the classroom later than the students, there would usually only be seats in the front rows, which would have prevented me from seeing the whole class. The other benefit of arriving early was that I was well prepared even before the teacher or the first student arrived. I could even have conversations with the teacher and the students before the class started, so the students better understood the purpose of the research and were willing to give more information in the questionnaires and in the interviews. On the other hand, a later entrance meant I would be the object of attention. That is to say, the students would be interrupted by the entrance of an observer even if the lesson had not yet started. Based on the experience of the pilot observations, an observation schedule was designed (see Appendix I).

The pilot classroom observation also provided a general profile of the facilities in the classrooms. Classroom layout fell into four types (see Table 4.2, below).

Table 4.2 The layout of computers in the multi-media classrooms

Types	No. of classrooms	No. of seats	No. of computers	Type of computers	CPU	Keyboard	Mouse
1	3	142	71	Old style	N/A	N/A	N/A
2	3	142	142	Old style	N/A	A	N/A
3	4	258	258	New with LCD	N/A	A	A
4	2	132	132	DELL with LCD	A	A	A
Total	12	674	603				

The first type was set up the first, and now looks rather old-fashioned. There were three classrooms of this type with a total of 142 seats for students but with only 71 sets of old style desk-top computers, that is to say, two students shared one computer. There was no CPU, key board or mouse with the computer. The students could read the contents on the screen, but they had no control over the computer at all. The second type was an improvement, although only slightly. There were three classrooms with a total of 142 seats for the students with 142 sets of old style desk-top computers. There was no CPU or mouse, but the students could adjust the volume on the keyboard. The third type contained updated computers with LCD screens. There were four classrooms with a total of 258 seats for the students and 258 desk-top computers. The computers were equipped with CPU, keyboards and a mouse for the students, but the students were not supposed to operate their own computers because the teachers controlled the teaching-learning process. The fourth style was the Interactive Computer Rooms. Two newly set-up Interactive Computer Rooms seating a total of 132 students and equipped with the latest version of interactive software were available for the students to practise spoken English and listening skills.

Questionnaires

The questionnaires for students were designed to collect resource information on the students and their English learning (see Appendix II for a Chinese version and Appendix III for an English version). There were three main parts in the pilot questionnaires:

personal information such as their majors and years of study; general information on English learning; and information specifically on Listening Comprehension. Taking ethical issues into consideration, the design of questions avoided any possible invasion of privacy, or any possibly sensitive questions. The students were not asked for their names or any other identifying information so that they would feel free to make frank comments on their learning, on the University and on the teachers. Open-ended questions can often demand too much of the respondents' time, so the majority of the questions were closed questions.

The questionnaires were administered to a class of 37 students. All the students had read the Information Sheet and signed the Consent Forms. The English teacher helped to hand out the questionnaires. All 37 students in that class returned the questionnaires. Three of them failed to notice that there were questions on the back of the paper; therefore, the answers to these questions were missing from these three students. This reminded me of the necessity to add a note at the bottom of the page to indicate that there were questions on the other side.

The initial analysis of these pilot questionnaires indicated that the questionnaire elicited the kinds of responses expected. In addition, piloting allowed for checking of the comprehensibility of the items, instructions and layout; the wording of questions; the format of the questions; the appearance; organisation and itemisation; the time taken; the ethical aspects; and the coding / classification system for data analysis. The questionnaires to be used in the main research were modified accordingly: the wording of the questions was improved to avoid ambiguities and further questions on autonomous learning, application of multi-media facilities and the Internet were added in order to elicit better supporting evidence for the research (see Appendix IV for a Chinese version and Appendix V for an English version).

4.6.2 Main research

The main phase of field work lasted for three months (October 2007 to December 2007, i.e. the second semester of the academic year 2007-8). It took place in the same

university as the pilot study. The research design for this phase is shown in Figure 4.3.

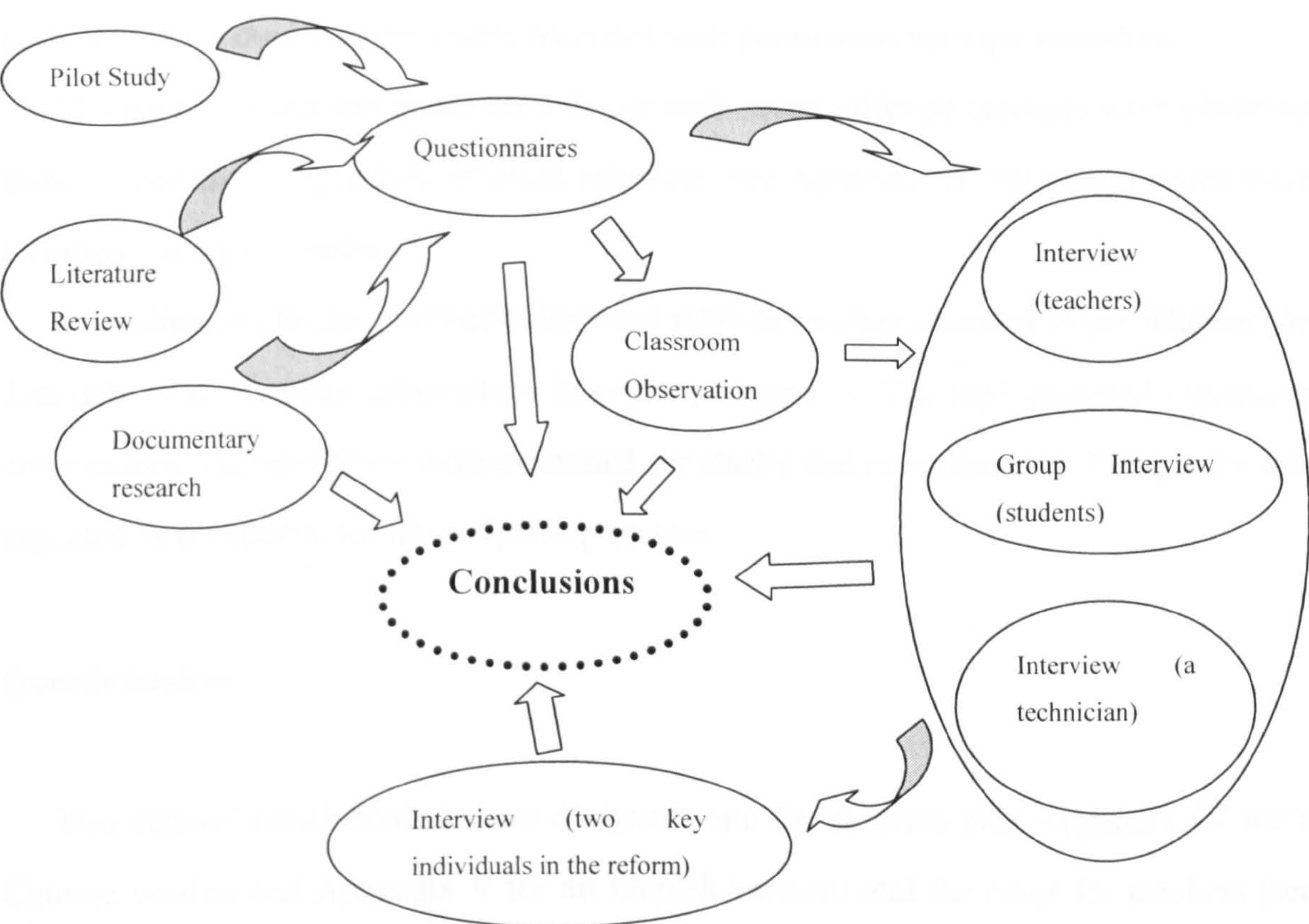


Figure 4.3 Main research field work design

During the first phase of the main study, as indicated in 4.5.2, questionnaires were administered to 20 full-time College English teachers and 227 non-English majors.

A preliminary analysis of the questionnaire data was carried out using SPSS. Based on the outcomes, questions were then designed for interviews with students and teachers. 15 students from five majors were interviewed in five groups and five teachers were interviewed separately. The students were all selected by their English teachers and agreed to be interviewed, whilst the teachers were selected on the basis of their teaching experience (detailed descriptions of teachers interviewed can be found in Table 4.5). Since the use of multi-media is a key element in the Reform, one technician was interviewed to obtain some technical information on the facilities in the classrooms and the general use of these facilities by teachers and students. Finally, two professors with key roles in the Reform but from another university were interviewed concerning their opinions on the

Reform. One was the general editor of the textbook used in University S and the other was an administrator who was in charge of the implementation of the Reform in Z province when it was first introduced; the latter was thus able to provide a comparative perspective. All the interviews were recorded with permission via mp3 recorders.

11 Listening Comprehension class hours with seven different teachers were observed using a specially designed observation schedule (see Appendix I). All these classes were recorded via mp3 recorders.

Recording of classroom observations and interviews were checked to see whether the data delivered complete information from the participants. The mp3-recorded classroom observations and interviews were examined for clarity and completeness. The quality was regarded as acceptable for transcription purposes.

Questionnaires

Two sets of questionnaires were designed: one for students (see Appendix IV for a Chinese version and Appendix V for an English version) and the other for teachers (see Appendix VI for a Chinese version and Appendix VII for an English version). The questionnaires for the students focused on their experience of English learning via multi-media and their viewpoints on the autonomous learning expected by the Reform. The questionnaires for the teachers aimed to investigate teachers' implementation of the Reform for English teaching-learning stated in the 'English Teaching Requirements' newly introduced by the Reform, and their perspectives on the students' autonomous learning. Questions were also designed to explore teachers' views on teaching-learning English Listening Comprehension, on teacher training and on the use of multi-media facilities. There were some overlapping questions in both questionnaires in order that the opinions of the two groups could be compared. For example, both students and teachers were asked what the biggest problems of Listening Comprehension were and what measures were most suitable for students to improve competence in Listening Comprehension.

145 second-year students and 82 first-year students in four majors participated; the

second-year students had already experienced most phases of their College English learning, thus, their answers may have reflected their true feelings about their English learning. The first-year students had just started their university life; their answers may have been influenced by expectations and desires. The questionnaires were administered to students just before the beginning of Listening Comprehension classes. The criteria for choosing the students were based on their majors and levels to provide for a roughly even sample of Level A and Level B students (117, 110 respectively) and a range of subject disciplines. The second-year students were from both science and arts disciplines, covering both Level A and Level B. The first-year students were all from Marketing, both Level A and Level B. Students follow College English courses only in the first two years of their degree programme.

Table 4.3 Breakdown of student completing questionnaires

STUDENTS COMPLETING THE QUESTIONNAIRES			
Grade	Major	Level	Number
1 st year	Marketing	A	40
1 st year	Marketing	B	42
2 nd year	Applied Chemistry	A	31
2 nd year	Japanese Language	B	35
2 nd year	Business Administration	A	46
2 nd year	Chinese Linguistics & Literature	B	33
		Total	227

The students were informed of the background to the research and their English teachers gave instructions, handed out and collected all the questionnaires. I was also in the classroom to answer any queries. It took them 10 to 15 minutes to finish all the questions. Most of them worked seriously and carefully.

Data from the questionnaires was analysed using SPSS for both descriptive and inferential analysis.

Step 1: the questionnaires were checked for completeness, accuracy, and uniformity. The questionnaires were also checked to confirm whether there was an answer to every question.

Step 2: Frequency distributions were used to show how many students or teachers

supported certain aspects.

Step 3: inferential conclusions were drawn from the data.

Step 4: the answers from the teachers were compared with those from the students to elicit similarities and differences.

Of the 227 questionnaires distributed to students, 204 (89.9%) were completed fully. Of the other 23, 11 students missed one question, two students missed two questions and two students missed three. It had already been found during the pilot study that many students did not notice the questions on the other side of the paper; therefore, an additional note had been put at the bottom of the first page to remind the students that there were questions on the other side. Nevertheless, eight students still did not notice the 11 questions on the other side of the paper.

20 teachers completed the questionnaires at the end of a routine meeting. I explained the research purpose and all the teachers were very supportive. It took most of them about 10 minutes to finish all the questions. 19 teachers completed the teachers' questionnaire fully. One had to leave and therefore failed to answer 13 questions. The analysis does not exclude those incomplete questionnaires because the answers for other questions from the one teacher and 23 students were felt to be still valuable.

Further analysis of the data following steps 2 to 4 can be found in Chapter 5.

Classroom observations

Data from classroom observations served as a cross-check on that from questionnaires and interviews. The research described here adopted semi-structured, non-participant overt observation. Based on the above-mentioned literature review and the research purpose, a classroom observation record was designed (see Appendix I) which enabled me to capture key events of teaching-learning process in the classes. An observation of teacher S.Y.'s class can be found in Appendix VIII for as example.

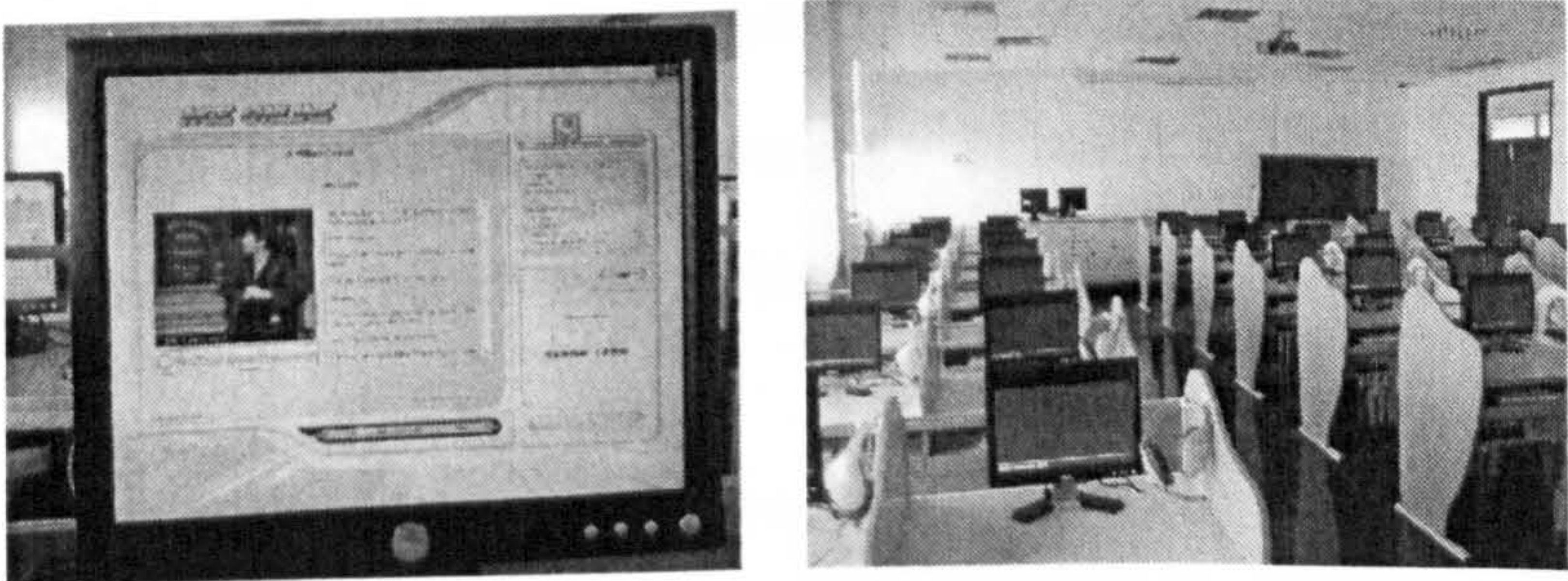
Listening Comprehension lessons lasting 1-2 hours (altogether 11 hours) were observed. The selection of the classes sought to balance the Arts majors and the Science majors; the levels of the classes (A & B) and the teachers' teaching experience (see Table

4.4).

Table 4.4 Listening Comprehension classroom observation

LISTENING COMPREHENSION CLASSROOM OBSERVATION					
Grade	Ss' Major	Level	T's age	T's teaching experience	Observation time
1 st year	Social Work	A	43	20 years	2 hours
2 nd year	Japanese Language	B	36	10 years	1 hour
2 nd year	Electronic Information	B	35	9 years	2 hours
2 nd year	Chinese Linguistics and Literature	B	27	3 years	2 hours
2 nd year	Civil Engineering	B	28	3 years	1 hour
2 nd year	Marketing	A	28	2 years	1 hour
2 nd year	Applied Chemistry	A	29	1 year	2 hours

The students took courses in multi-media classrooms with computers, overhead projectors, a large canvas screen, and a whiteboard in each room (see Clip 4.2). But the classroom layout was different in some respects (see Table 4.2 in section 4.6.1).



Clip 4.2 Computer monitor display and layout of a multi-media classroom

There were four class hours in the morning and four in the afternoon. Listening Comprehension was usually allocated two class hours per week. I made sure I entered the multi-media classroom 15 minutes before the session started. Thus, there was enough time

for me to select a seat for observation and to prepare everything. The location I usually chose was the seat in the last row in one corner of the classroom where I was able to see the teacher, most of the students and their computer monitors. The visual field was sufficient for me to see any changes or abnormal display on the students' computer monitors. The early entrance also allowed me to watch the whole class from the moment the very first student entered the classroom. During most of the observations, some of the students chatted with me before the lesson started and during the break between two class hours. The conversation served as a useful incidental source of information on the students' perspective on the Reform and on their English work.

Interviews

Participants

The research adopted semi-structured individual interviews with five teachers, one technician and two key individuals in the Reform. As regards the students, the research employed a mixed method of one-to-one interviewing and group interviewing. All the interviews were recorded using mp3 recorders with the informants' permission.

Five teachers were selected for individual interview, one of whom was male (Table 4.5). As far as was possible, individuals were selected to give a range of age, years of teaching experience, and gender. As noted earlier, there was only one male College English teacher in the Language School, so he was the only male participant. The interview with each teacher lasted for about one hour.

Table 4.5 Teachers interviewed

	Male/Female	Age	Experience years
Teacher 1 YY (Vice Dean)	F	43	20
Teacher 2 XC	F	35	9
Teacher 3 DQ	F	28	2
Teacher 4 ZY	F	45	21
Teacher 5 JL	M	29	1

Two key individuals in the Reform were also interviewed. One was the general editor

of the textbook used, here indicated as the editor HL; and the other was in charge of the implementation of the Reform in Z province when it was first introduced, here indicated as the Administrator JY. The interview with HL lasted for about one hour, whilst the interview with JY lasted approximately 35 minutes. The interview with the technician took the form of casual conversation.

15 students in five majors were selected as informants for semi-structured group interview (Table 4.6). The majors covered both Arts and Sciences, both Level A and Level B. The informants were students recommended by their English teachers with the only criterion that they should be willing to talk. There were three informants in each group, and both males and females were represented. The average interview time was one hour. Details of the groups are shown in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6 Group interview of students

	Major	Level
Group 1	Marketing	Level B
Group 2	Bioengineering	Level A
Group 3	Chinese Linguistics and Literature	Level B
Group 4	Electronic Information	Level B
Group 5	Business Administration	Level A

Procedure

Semi-structured interviews based on the literature review were used as a follow-up the classroom observations and the initial analysis of the questionnaires. The questions were intended to elicit the informants’ views relevant to the research focuses, and to further explore their expectations in relation to the Reform, any sources of dissatisfaction and their suggestions for teaching and learning Listening Comprehension. All the interviews were recorded by mp3 recorders with the interviewees’ consent. Questions for interviewing students can be found in Appendix IX and questions for teachers in Appendix X.

The detailed procedure for interviews with the students is illustrated in Table 4.7:

Table 4.7 Interview schedule (students)

Pre-interview	Checking the students' timetable
Starting the interview	Brief introduction to the background of the research. Asking permission for recording by mp3 recorders
Interviewing	Discussing the National English Teaching Reform, the College English Test (CET), Listening Comprehension practice after class, and autonomous study, etc.
Finishing the interview	Inviting the interviewees to raise any points that they think still need to be covered and had not yet been covered
	Inviting the interviewees to ask any questions about studying English
	Thanking the interviewees for their time and cooperation

The interview with the teachers, the Administrator and the editor took place in classrooms or offices. The selected teachers, the Administrator and the chief editor were contacted ahead of schedule to confirm the time. An excerpt from the interview with the chief editor can be found in Appendix XI, and an example of the group interview with students can be found in Appendix XII. As regards the technician, he was always in the multi-media classrooms during the break time to help solve any technical problems that occurred, which gave me the opportunity to have several discussions with him about the multi-media facilities and the students' learning.

4.7 Reliability, Validity and Objectivity

The research was designed on the principles of *reliability*, *validity* and *objectivity* for the quantitative data, and *dependability*, *credibility* and *confirmability* for the qualitative data. In this section, definitions of these terms will first be presented, followed by discussion of the application of these principles in my research.

Mertens (1998) argues that the way the researcher chooses to operationalise the attributes is crucial in that this determines the inferences that can be made from the data. Beyond conceptual relevance and appropriateness, the researcher needs to consider the quality of the data collection strategy. Three standards have emerged for judging quantitative research: 'reliability, validity, and objectivity' (p.287).

Reliability

Reliability means consistency – ‘consistency of the test in measuring whatever it does measure’ (Wiersma, 1969:185). Wellington (2000) describes reliability as ‘the extent to which studies can be replicated’ (p.31).

Another synonym used for reliability is *dependability* of the measurement. Guba and Lincoln (1989) identify dependability as the qualitative parallel to reliability. Mertens (1998) argues that the quality of the data collection can be determined by means of a dependability audit in which the change process can be inspected to ‘attest to the quality and appropriateness of the inquiry process’ (p.290).

The purpose of measurement is to get an accurate estimate of a particular attribute. Accuracy is achieved by minimizing sources of error as much as possible and obtaining an estimate of how much error remains. Two types of errors can influence performance on a measurement instrument: systematic and unsystematic. Systematic errors inflate or deflate performance in a fixed way and thus do not affect a measure’s reliability. (They do, however, affect validity.) On the other hand, unsystematic errors vary at random from situation to situation and therefore cannot be predicted.

Faking may occur when the informants give deliberately inaccurate indications of their attitudes, personality, or interests. Sometimes this occurs if the researcher, or the question itself, indicates that certain results will have positive consequences (Wiersma, 1969; Borg and Gall, 1979; and Denscombe, 1998). In my research, students were informed of the purpose of the study after they had completed the questionnaires and interviews. Furthermore, in order to avoid ‘faking’, the questionnaires were anonymous and the interviewees were not asked for identification so that most of their answers could be reliable. Teachers, two key individuals and the technician staff, on the contrary, were informed the aims of my research. For reasons of confidentiality and ethics purposes, their names are not used in the research. All of them seemed willing to answer my questions openly.

Validity

The appropriateness of a data collection instrument is only partially determined by its reliability. A second category of quality in quantitative research is the *validity* of the meaning of scores derived from the data collection instrument.

The conventional definition of the validity (*credibility*) of an instrument is the extent to which it measures what it was intended to measure. In practice, however, the validity of an instrument is assessed in relation to the extent to which evidence can be generated to support the claim that the instrument measures attributes targeted in the proposed research.

Messick (1995) broadly defines validity as ‘nothing less than an evaluative summary of both the evidence for and the actual - as well as potential - consequences of score interpretation and use’ (p.742). He argues for a unified concept of validity that integrates consideration of validity of content, criteria, and consequences under the concept of construct validity. He defines construct validity as the evidence and rationales that support the trustworthiness of score meaning. He further explains construct validity as follows: ‘In principle as well as in practice, construct validity is based on an integration of any evidence that bears on the interpretation or meaning of test scores - including content- and criterion-related evidence - which are thus subsumed as part of construct validity’ (ibid).

If the purpose of the research is to evaluate achievement of a specific body of knowledge, the researcher needs to be concerned with content validity. The researcher needs to be certain that the test covers the appropriate content (Mertens, 1998). Muijs (2004) argues that content validity refers to ‘whether or not the content of the manifest variables is right to measure the latent concept that the researcher is trying to measure’ (p.66). To establish content validity, the items or tasks in the measurement instrument should be reviewed to determine the degree to which they represent the sample of the behaviour domain of interest in the research study.

There are also categories of internal validity and external validity. Mertens (1998) states that internal validity means that the changes observed in the dependent variable are due to the effect of the independent variable, not to some other unintended variables

(p.64). External validity is the extent to which findings in one study can be applied to another situation. If the findings from one study are observed in another situation, the results are said to be subject to generalisation or externally valid (Borg and Gall, 1979; Le Compte and Preissle, 1984).

Guba and Lincoln (1989) identify *credibility* as the criterion in qualitative research.

In this particular research, validity was considered seriously from the very beginning of the research design. As mentioned in section 4.5, the scores in the Entrance Examination of the participants were average for the country as a whole; therefore, the English level of the participants could be representative of the English level of the majority of non-English majors in China at university level. With regard to the design of questionnaires and interviews, the content was a combination of documentary review and other researchers' studies of all the relevant aspects of the Reform. Therefore, the outcomes from the research were considered to be valid as a measurement of the implementation of the Reform.

Moreover, triangulation was used to reduce the risk of systematic distortions inherent in the use of only one method, because 'no single method is completely free from all possible validity threats' (Maxwell, 1998:93). Qualitative data from interview and classroom observation was collected as a way of supplementing the data from the questionnaires, adding detail and depth. During the interview, students were presented with the opportunity to explain their views and identify what they regarded as the crucial factors. The outcomes from analyzing the quantitative data and the researcher's summary were then checked against what the participants said. The one-to-one semi-structured interviews not only made it fairly straightforward to locate specific ideas with a specific student, but also encouraged the interviewees to develop ideas and speak more broadly on the issues.

Objectivity

In quantitative studies, *objectivity* refers to how much the measurement instrument is open to influence by the beliefs and biases of the individuals who administer, score or

interpret it (Wiersma, 1969; and Mertens, 1998). Objectivity is determined by the amount of judgment that is called for in these three processes. More objective measures consist of multiple-choice and true-false format options. Less objective measures include essay tests, although these can be made more objective by establishing criteria for scoring the responses. In some research situations, objectivity is deliberately sacrificed to allow the respondents freedom to express their own ideas in their own way.

Guba and Lincoln (1989) identify *confirmability* as the qualitative parallel to objectivity. Objectivity means that the influence of the researcher's judgment is minimized. Confirmability means that the data and their interpretation are not figments of the researcher's imagination.

In my study, the research design was based on other researchers' contributions and my own experience so that bias from individuals could be reduced. Moreover, I have not taught College English since the Reform was introduced, which means that data collected and data analysed were not filtered through my own first-hand experience.

4.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, the research questions have been presented, and the research paradigm discussed. To answer the research questions, a mixed methodology was applied and the specific instruments used to collect data have been described and justified. The approach to data analysis has been briefly outlined and an indication given of how consideration of such concepts as reliability, validity and objectivity (dependability, credibility and confirmability) informed decision-making.

The next chapter presents the analyses of the quantitative and qualitative data.

CHAPTER 5 FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

The main focus of this research was the implementation of the Reform of National English Teaching at college level in China with reference to such issues as how a particular university has modified its approach to English teaching and to what extent the changes intended by the Reform have been implemented.

As indicated in Chapter 4, the research employed a mixed methodology, which produced both quantitative and qualitative data. In this chapter, the data drawn from students and teachers using questionnaires, classroom observations and interviews is analysed to describe the implementation of the Reform in the selected research site, University S. The data has been analysed to answer the following research questions:

- Q1. What have the University authorities done to ensure implementation of the Reform?
- Q2. To what extent have the changes in the teaching-learning of English intended by the Reform been implemented with particular reference to teaching-learning of Listening Comprehension?
- Q3. What use is made of the multi-media facilities by students and teachers to improve students' Listening Comprehension?
- Q4. What obstacles to the implementation of the Reform, if any, have emerged? To what extent could these have been anticipated?

In the following analysis, frequency distributions based on questionnaire data from both students and teachers are used to indicate how many students support certain aspects of the Reform and how far the teachers' answers are similar to those of students. Data from classroom observations and interviews is used to explain and supplement the outcomes of the questionnaires. All questionnaires and interviews were in Chinese; therefore translated quotations from these reflect my own understanding.

Section 5.2, which follows, answers Q1 (the measures taken by the authorities in University S to implement the Reform). Section 5.3 answers Q2 (changes related to Listening Comprehension), focusing particularly on the teaching-learning of English Listening Comprehension, learner autonomy, and the influence of the reviewed CET. Section 5.4, which answers Q3, discusses the application of multi-media facilities, the intranet and the Internet. Q4 (obstacles to the implementation of the Reform) is then answered in Section 5.5. Finally, section 5.6 draws some brief conclusions.

5.2 Structural Measures Taken to Implement the Reform

Much of the primary responsibility for the implementation of the Reform lay with University authorities. As suggested by Gross, Giacquinta and Bernstein (1971) in section 2.5.2, management is expected to adjust arrangements, to provide training, and to provide resource for adopters' better understanding and implementation.

The introduction of the Reform in University S started in 2005. According to the Vice Dean of the Language School and one of the senior teachers, who were both in charge of College English teaching, they followed the objectives of the Reform and set Teaching Requirements for two levels of students: Level A (comparatively higher English level) and Level B (comparatively lower English level) (see 4.5.1). To implement the Reform, the authorities in University S took a number of steps:

- They invested in facilities and in training teachers.
- They selected the most suitable textbooks.
- They changed the teaching plans.
- They strengthened supervision of using computer systems for teaching.

Each of these measures is discussed in detail as follows:

Investment in facilities and in training teachers

In order to provide suitable facilities for practising listening and speaking, the University invested in six multi-media classrooms with 390 computers and two interactive computer rooms. Each multi-media room is equipped with computers and headphones, an overhead projector, a monitor and a blackboard. A detailed description of computer facilities was given in 4.6.1. With regard to the software, the technician reported that the system was initially determined and installed by the University but teachers were also encouraged to suggest any software required. Teachers all acknowledged support of the IT staff in installing the required software and the required learning materials. Two interactive computer rooms were made available for self-access use by Level A students, and teachers were allocated to support their practice; this will be further discussed in 5.3.4. In addition to the computer rooms, there was also an English radio broadcast for the purpose of increasing students' 'exposure to the language'. The radio programme will be further discussed in 5.3.6.

As discussed in 2.9.1, researchers such as Zimmer-Loew (2008) and Lantolf (2009) suggest that teachers should be trained in new technical skills. The University authorities believed that due to the increasing demands of using computers and the Internet, teachers should be trained at least once in a 'half-day workshop'. This consisted of a lecture demonstrating how to operate the facilities in the multi-media computer rooms and suggestions on how to use the Internet and the intranet for teaching. Only after completing this brief training were teachers considered qualified to use the multi-media computer rooms. Besides the general training, four teachers were also trained to use the interactive facilities by professional software designers. Thereafter, other teachers were trained by those four teachers. Those four teachers were in charge of the interactive computer rooms during the research.

In addition to a training workshop, as suggested by Davidson and Tesh (1997) and Richards (2001) (see 2.9.1), routine meetings among teachers and administrators were also arranged once a week to collaborate on teaching plans and discuss teaching progress.

Selection of the most suitable textbook packages

The textbook is an essential part of classroom teaching and learning. The teacher who was, at the time of interview, in charge of College English teaching in University S, claimed:

“Previously, we paid the most attention on reading ...the textbooks, most textbooks focused on reading; therefore, the only input was reading. Currently, we aim to balance input and output, thus, the Reform, the textbooks target listening which is input and speaking which is output.”

(Teacher ZY, interview)

As implied, the new textbook packages do not focus on reading only, but aim to balance listening and other skills of learning English such as speaking, reading and writing as required by the Reform. University S chose a textbook package (‘New College English’) other than the four specially designed for the Reform. Textbook selection and use in University S will be further discussed in 5.3.3.

Changed teaching plans

One further important measure to realise the aims of the Reform was to adjust the teaching plans. As mentioned in 4.5.1, for the purpose of the College English courses, most of the non-English-major students were allocated to Level A classes and Level B classes according to their English scores in the Entrance Examination. The students in Level A classes had higher English scores than those in Level B. This measure is similar to the division into ‘advanced classes’ and ‘normal classes’ in Wuhan University (see 3.2.1). Teaching plans were changed at the beginning of the Reform, and further changes to teaching plans for Level B students took place after two years’ trial implementation due to the lack of after-class practice and the ‘limited rights’ for Level B students to use the campus facilities. It transpired that their requirements had been considered and a solution had been designed for the forthcoming term. Previously there had been only two classroom hours for Listening Comprehension every other week. In the semester

following the research, two classroom hours were allocated each week. These two hours were intended mostly to provide a balance between CET practice and textbook teaching. This may seem to represent a doubling of the teaching hours contrary to the intention to make use of self-access facilities. However, the Vice Dean explained that it was a way of compensating for the fact that there were not enough computers for self-access.

Moreover, in order to address students' anxiety about passing the CET, classroom hours were allocated particularly for CET practice one or two months before a CET exam. This will be further discussed in 5.3.7.

Supervision of the use of computer systems for teaching

Due to the fact that some teachers were not familiar with computerised teaching, on-line assignments, or on-line contact, the University authorities carefully monitored teachers' progress with all these computerised tasks. For example, at the beginning of each term, every teacher was required to select from the database all students in his / her own class and group them to his / her list. During the whole term, every teacher was required to supervise and check students' on-line practice, and arrange after-class assignments, which would count towards the students' final scores. With teachers' permission, the authorities tracked teachers' on-line tasks; this revealed that some teachers (mostly part-time) were initially found never to have completed their on-line tasks. However, it was reported by the Vice Dean that by 2007, when this research was carried out, every teacher was used to handling their students on line.

It seemed that, comparing to Gross, Giacquinta and Bernstein's (1971) suggestion of what the management can do (see 2.5.2), the university authorities had made appropriate efforts to support teachers and learners. They had followed the requirements of the Reform by making changes to the teaching plans and seeking to develop teachers' ability relevant to the application of multi-media facilities and the Internet. They had also devised a strategy for dealing with students of different English proficiency levels. However, the research revealed that the efforts made were less than what was needed. For

example, there were still not enough computer facilities for self-access; and teacher training was not sufficient to guarantee the efficient use of computer facilities. These problems will be discussed in the following sections.

The Reform required efforts from not only the authorities, but also all the participants such as teachers and learners; especially for the purpose of enhancing listening comprehension abilities, which is one of the key reform objectives. The next section deals with the teaching and learning of Listening Comprehension in the Reform.

5.3 Measures Taken to Improve Students' Listening Comprehension

This section looks into the changes in teaching and learning English Listening Comprehension intended by the Reform, which answers Research Q2. 5.3.1 explores factors influencing Listening Comprehension, and 5.3.2 investigates the Listening Comprehension class teaching schedule. At the same time, textbook-related materials are the basic tool for students to practise listening comprehension, especially during classroom hours. In 5.3.3, English Listening Comprehension textbooks based on the English Curriculum Requirements are surveyed and evaluated. 5.3.4 deals with teachers' support for the development of learners' listening. 5.3.5 describes students' autonomous learning. The contribution of the campus English broadcasts is discussed in 5.3.6. Finally, CET in the Reform is explored.

5.3.1 Factors influencing Listening Comprehension

Researchers such as Brown and Yule (1983), Underwood (1989), Nunan (1995) and Samuels (2001) have explored factors influencing Listening Comprehension (see 2.8.1). Their research found that Listening Comprehension abilities could be influenced by the speakers, the listeners, the content and the support available. That is to say, the influencing factors could be inside the head or outside the head. In this section, the focus is on teachers' and students' views of the factors influencing Listening Comprehension at

University S, especially the potential role of English movies and native English teachers. The role of computers will be discussed briefly in this section and full analysis will be in 5.4.

Factors influencing Listening Comprehension

Learning English does not just involve the mastering of grammar, nor of just listening and speaking. Successful English learning depends on a combination of factors: learners' attitudes towards English learning, and in particular, their viewpoints on listening, speaking, reading and writing; learners' achievement motivation; their learning strategies; the quality of textbooks; and teachers' support.

Students and teachers both understand that Listening Comprehension is one of the essential competences. For example, one student commented: "If I cannot understand what the others are talking about, how can I speak?" (Student 15, interview) One teacher also observed:

"Listening Comprehension is important as the main target of learning English. We are learning English for the purpose of using the language, therefore listening is an essential step before one can use the language naturally."

(Teacher ZY, interview)

Students and teachers were both asked about the most difficult factors in Listening Comprehension (Figure 5.1).

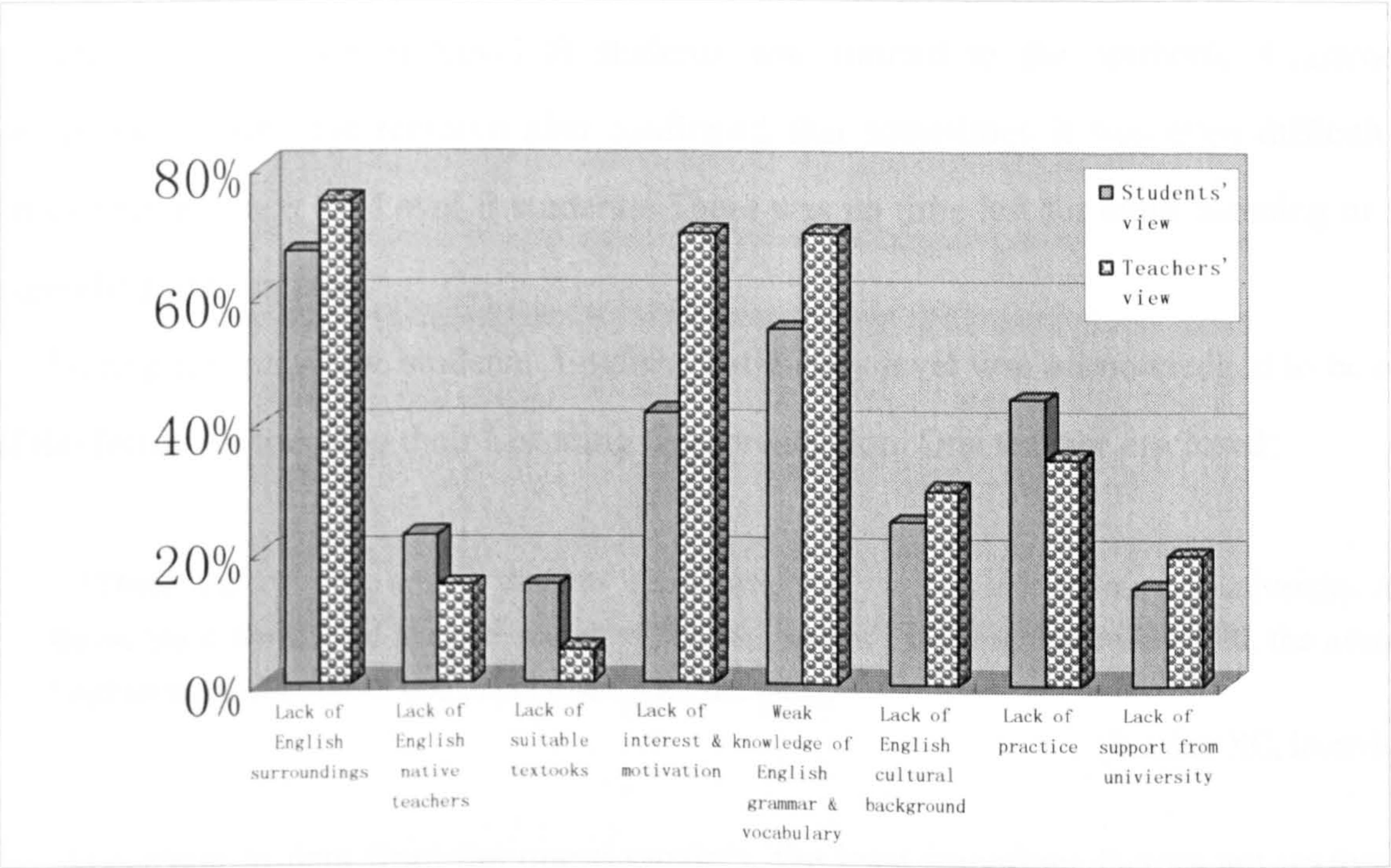


Figure 5.1 The most difficult factors in Listening Comprehension

The figure shows that the students' opinions were similar to those of the teachers. The lack of an English speaking environment was seen as the most difficult factor for the students, followed by weak knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary. It seems that the students were aware of both external and internal factors in their study.

From the students' viewpoint, the third most important factor was lack of practice, whilst the teachers argued that it was lack of interest and motivation. 10% of the teachers claimed that the students were not at all able to learn English autonomously, and 50% argued that the students were mostly not able to learn autonomously. As the students were divided into Level A and Level B, there also existed differences between these two groups. One teacher reported:

“We set different goals for students of different levels. We are using textbooks of different levels within the same series. During the classroom hours, our practices for Level A and Level B were also different. For Level B, we just had enough time to finish the textbook explanation, so we usually gave up the idea of using any extra articles to expand Listening Comprehension or any activities relevant to spoken English. Even if we struggled sometimes to set up spoken English activities, they were not able to participate, so we gave up. Therefore, for my students (Level B), that's all.”

(Teacher XC, interview)

Thus, the practice of Level B students was limited to the textbook. Classroom observation during the research also confirmed that sometimes it was even difficult to finish only one text for Level B students. There was no time left for extra listening or for expanding the contents.

During the interview, students' English proficiency level was acknowledged to be one of the factors influencing their Listening Comprehension. One teacher disclosed:

“There was a big gap among students' scores when they were admitted into this university. As I know, the difference of average scores of the two majors I am teaching reached 20, the average English score was 79 for one major and 99 for the other.”

(Teacher XC, interview)

According to data from the questionnaires, the least important factors are textbooks and native English teachers, which means that neither teachers nor students attributed the difficulties of improving Listening Comprehension to textbooks or the lack of native English teachers. The role and effect of the textbooks will be discussed in section 5.3.3, but it is perhaps important to note here that it is not necessary to stick to the recommended textbooks and other series can also be employed as long as they are suitable for certain students. However, there were many other resources available for listening practice, such as English video programmes and on-line stories, thus, textbooks were seen as the least important factor in improving Listening Comprehension. However, if the other resources were not used, then presumably the textbook was important. As regards the native English teachers, whose role will be discussed later in this section, both teachers and students agreed that this is not a key factor influencing their listening skills.

From the above data analysis, the new textbook packages introduced as part of the Reform might be regarded as just a guide for, or an example of, but not the only resource for, teaching-learning Listening Comprehension. Rather curiously, teachers were judged to be unimportant in students' improvement of Listening Comprehension.

Students’ and teachers’ views of desirable measures to improve Listening Comprehension

Besides the textbooks, the students had various other options to improve their listening ability. Figure 5.2 shows the measures the students said they used to improve their Listening Comprehension outside class.

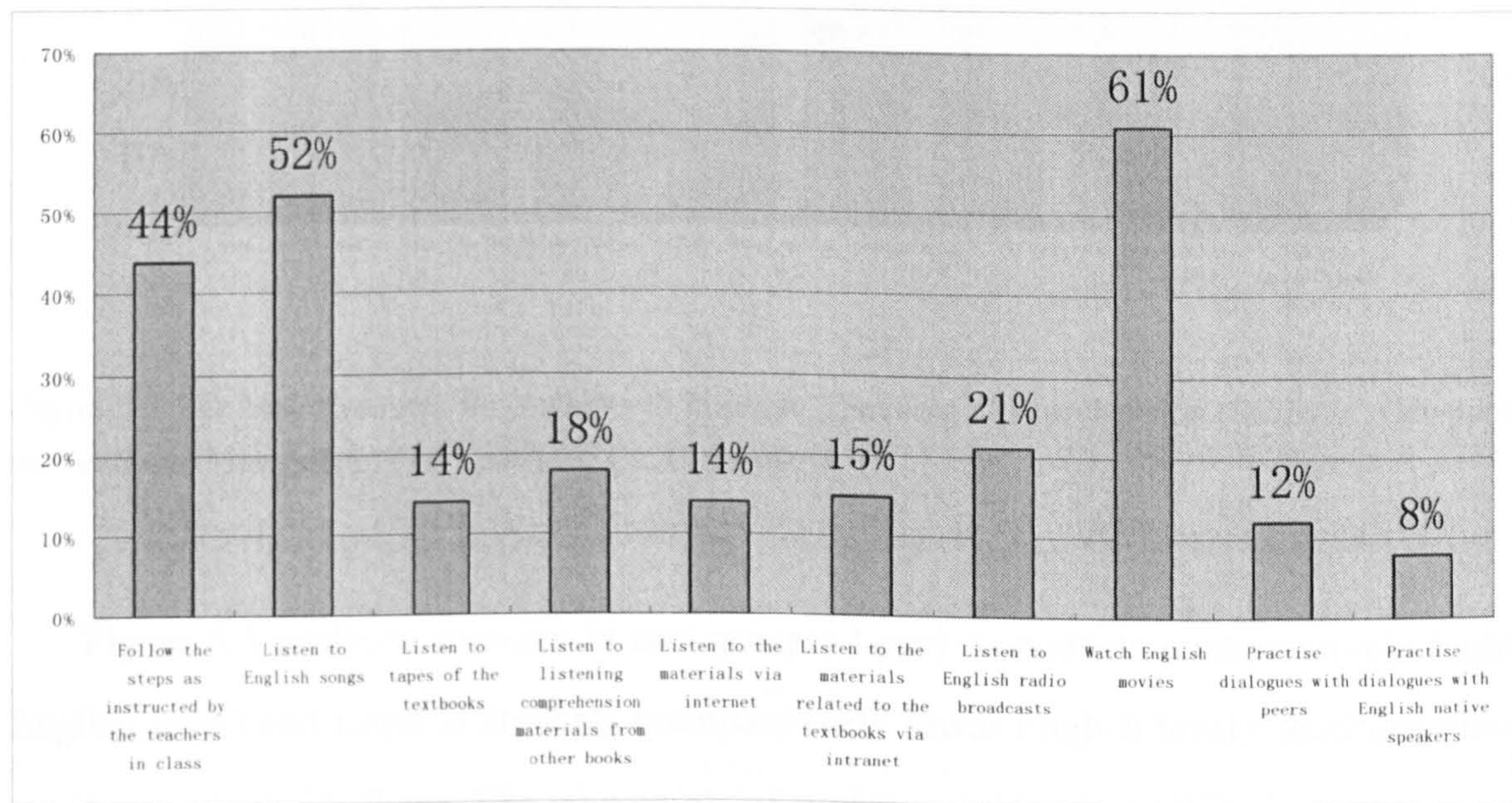


Figure 5.2 What students choose to do outside class to improve their Listening Comprehension

To judge from Figure 5.2, the most desirable thing to improve Listening Comprehension, from students’ viewpoint, was to watch English movies (61%) and the second was to listen to English songs (52%). 44% of students chose to do what the teachers required them to do.

The data shows that comparatively more first-year students chose to follow the steps as instructed by the teachers in the class and the first-year students seemed to spend less time watching movies and listening to songs.

The students’ preferences as regards the best measures to improve their Listening Comprehension are compared with the teachers’ viewpoints in Figure 5.3.

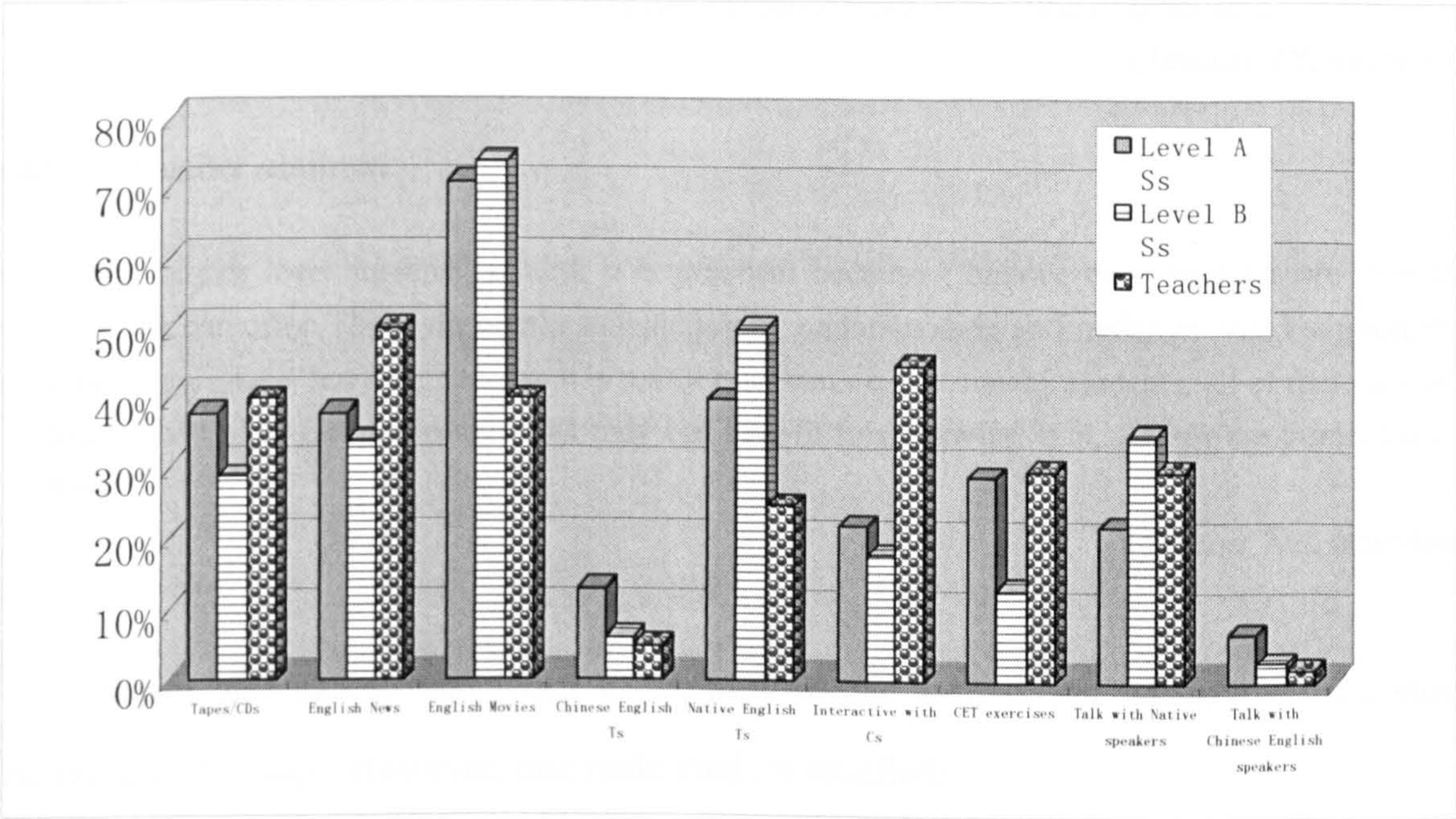


Figure 5.3 The best measures for students to improve Listening Comprehension (Students’ viewpoints vs. Teachers’ viewpoints) (Ts: Teachers; Cs: Computers)

Figure 5.3 analyses students in two groups: Level A students (comparatively higher English level) and Level B students (comparatively lower English level); teachers’ views are shown alongside these. The viewpoints of students and teachers differ in many aspects. The top two choices from the students are: watching English movies, with a percentage of more than 70%, and having lectures by native English teachers, with a percentage of about 45%. The teachers did not think highly of these two measures, with percentages of 40% and 25% respectively. The Vice Dean claimed: “Neither of these has been used for our non-English major students”. This difference between students and teachers indicated the possibility of exploiting students’ curiosity and their highly positive expectations of English movies and native English teachers. The following part explores the potential roles of both role of English movies and the role of native English teachers.

The role of English movies

One teacher argued:

“Most students choose English movies just for fun instead of learning or practising.”

(Teacher ZY, interview)

Another teacher claimed:

“For higher level students, I think it is practical because I believe they expect more than the textbook can offer. They will obtain satisfaction by understanding an English movie. I support that kind of *enjoyable* learning because it is really informative. But for my students, all of them are of a lower level of English. I do not think they can benefit from movies. It is, ... they are purely killing time.”

(Teacher XC, interview)

Students also agreed that when watching a movie their primary focus was the story and not the language. However, one male student recalled:

“I enjoy the story while watching a new movie, but I would like to see it a second or a third time for the purposes of learning and practising. It is beneficial and does work for me.”

(Student 13, interview)

However, most of the other students admitted that they would not watch the same thing a second or a third time. Thus, the benefits from English movies might not be as much as they had claimed or expected. All the students interviewed preferred to see movies with subtitles, ideally with both Chinese and English subtitles. One student commented on her experience:

“Sometimes, it is ... (very nice) when I come across some words that I have learned ... from the subtitles.”

(Student 15, interview)

Other views in relation to movies in English can be categorised into three groups:

Group 1: they can learn something from movies:

“But at least I am listening to English while looking at the Chinese subtitles.”

(Student 1, interview)

“We can learn daily dialogues. Some classical sentences are good to learn, short sentences ... Yes, short sentences.”

(Student 8, interview)

Group 2: English movies are not so helpful for English learning:

“We will only focus on the story if there are only Chinese subtitles.”

(Student 3, interview);

“From my viewpoint, it is not helpful to learn English by watching English movies.”

(Student 6, interview)

Group 3: English movies can be helpful with some prerequisites:

“I will look for those with both subtitles, but if there is only an English version I might not be so interested. It might be better if teachers can explain a little for us.”

(Student 15, interview)

“One is able to learn something if s/he intends to while seeing the movies, but one can learn nothing at all if s/he watches English movies just for fun.”

(Student 7, interview)

One young teacher also suggested:

“It will be much better if teachers can help with vocabulary and provide some cultural or background information related to that movie. I often recommend some cartoons and movies with simple dialogues. For example, I once recommended a cartoon with the Bible as background; I prepared an introduction on the Bible and on Israel.”

(Teacher DQ, interview)

Students also expected the University to offer some English movies free of charge. When they were asked about a convenient time for them to see free English movies on campus, they chose when they were ‘free’ during evenings or weekends but this depended on whether the movie was ‘attractive’ or not; furthermore, they would not want to see the ‘same’ movies. Moreover, some students said they would prefer to go shopping or visit friends, whilst some students would go back home during weekends. One male student said:

“On weekends we are sure to choose to be relaxed outside the campus, or to surf the Internet.”

(Student 6, interview)

One female student suggested:

“Maybe evenings from Monday to Thursday are better choices. Friday evenings are not so suitable.”

(Student 15, interview)

On the other hand, some ‘non-compulsory’ courses were arranged in the evening from Monday to Friday, so students had different schedules. As a matter of fact, the University had tried showing free English movies, but this experiment only lasted for a few months because fewer and fewer students attended. The male teacher had also tried to play some BBC teaching movies with English subtitles. He reported:

“They were interested at the very beginning, but later on, when there were more and more unfamiliar words, they lost interest and then lost confidence. I switched to movies with Chinese subtitles and they became more interested. Some good students were willing to follow up and learn something.”

(Teacher JL, interview)

Hence, opportunities had been provided for students to be exposed to more real language in English movies, which could be regarded as being helpful to students’ listening competence, though teacher support and learner effort are required. This finding agrees with the research of Little, Devitt and Singleton (1989), and that of Gardner (1999) discussed in 2.9.4. English movies could be more helpful if they had Chinese subtitles which maintain learners’ interest. However, the interviews revealed that students with a lower English level felt that they comparatively benefited less.

The role of native English teachers

With regard to native English teachers, the students were asked about their expectations. The most popular answer was that they hoped to listen to accurate pronunciation, whilst two students mentioned culture and one student thought the language environment was important; another student said they were curious about native English teachers’ lectures. One of them argued:

“Though we can learn spoken English from CDs and lectures, don’t you think it is a fixed

language? It is not alive. It would be much better to have a native English teacher who is able to adjust the language according to the changing environment. That is real English.”

(Student 9, interview)

Many students have never had the opportunity to converse with an native English speaker; the only experience one student had had with a native speaker was nodding, smiling and saying ‘hello’ to an English teacher on campus. Though they were eager to have native English teachers in class, many students admitted that they would not be willing to converse with such teachers; it implies that they preferred to *listen* to the native English teachers speaking English in the class but *produce* nothing themselves. One male student said that he could only say ‘hello’ and then he did not know what to say. Another recalled an English activity once held on campus:

“We had an English corner with native English teachers. English majors were talking freely with them, but we stood there at loss. It took quite a few moments for us to understand what they were talking about, so... we did not talk a lot.”

(Student 10, interview)

Other students echoed:

“I ... suddenly forgot all the sentences I had learned ...”

(Student 14, interview)

“Just can’t say anything at all.”

(Student 13, interview)

“We are shy with our poor English. I am afraid that native teachers *cannot understand* my English.”

(Student 11, interview)

From these quotations, it appeared that students lacked confidence not only in their own listening ability but also in the native English teachers’ listening and understanding ability because they “cannot understand” when Chinese students speak English. One female student expressed her desire to speak to native teachers, but she recalled:

“Generally, we did not speak English, ... and it seems that native English teachers could not at all organise any activities.”

(Student 5, interview)

It means that students were not used to speaking English, and native English teachers were not good at managing classroom activities, though they were good English speakers.

Teachers also commented on the uneven quality of the native English teachers. One teacher argued:

“Some native English teachers are not really qualified as language teachers, they ARE native speakers but they never prepare for their lectures and do nothing during class hours.”

(Teacher XC, interview)

One student suggested that native English teachers were suitable for higher level students whilst Chinese English teachers were suitable for lower level students. Another student offered a suggestion:

“It might be much better if the teacher is Chinese but has lived in English-speaking countries for several years.”

(Student 13, interview)

One conclusion that can be drawn is that the native English teachers were felt to be not so helpful because of either the teaching skills of those teachers or the listening / speaking skills of the students. It seemed that students might expect their teachers to be able to talk to them in English like a native speaker, but also be able to communicate with them like a Chinese teacher.

The role of computers

In contrast, the teachers evaluated highly interactive practice with computers, although the students' support for this was on the low side, with less than 20%. The students' argument was mainly based on two considerations: firstly, only Level A students could get access to the interactive computer facilities, and most Level B students had not even heard of the Interactive computer rooms at all; secondly, the students who were using the facilities agreed that it was good to practise with the computers but it was not their preferred choice because there were some problems with the computers.

For instance, some students complained that they were treated ‘unfairly’ by the computer system because they were always scored lower than expected. A ‘smiling icon’ was supposed to pop up when the input pronunciation was correct and excellent, or a ‘crying icon’ when the input pronunciation was wrong or poor. There was also a ‘motionless icon’ when the input pronunciation was correct but not good enough. The students claimed that they only got a ‘crying icon’ no matter how hard they had been trying and sometimes a ridiculous ‘smiling icon’ when they just shouted at the machine out of desperation. Some teachers agreed that there were occasional problems of this kind, but pointed out that the system required a distinctively clear and loud pronunciation to earn a ‘smiling icon’. The system was not ‘crazy’, as some students described it, but had in-built high-level criteria and sometimes mis-scored undistinguishable sounds. Further discussion on the application of computer facilities can be found in Section 5.4.

For teachers, the best method students could use to improve their listening was to listen to English news. The students agreed up to a point, with a percentage of nearly 40%, but it was not their first choice. They also felt that the news was uninteresting and required a broad vocabulary.

Further comparison within the students’ groups

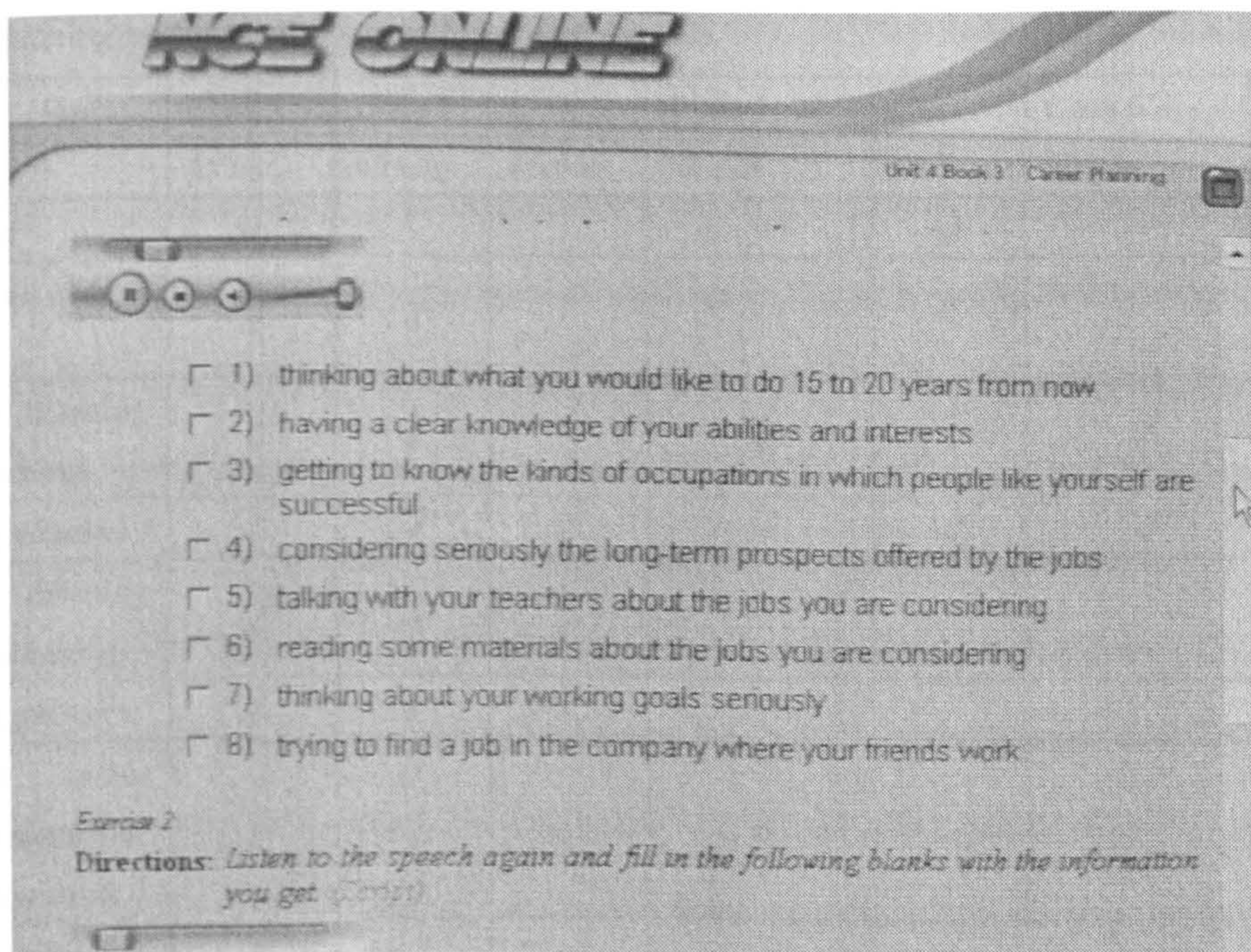
Within the students’ groups, the percentages of Level A students’ choices were higher than Level B students’ except for three aspects: watching English movies, having lectures by native English teachers and talking to native English speakers. This may have been partly because the English proficiency of Level B students was comparatively low; they were less willing to learn English, and this was one of the reasons why they chose more relaxed measures to learn, such as seeing movies and *listening* to native English teachers. As regards talking with native English speakers, it might be just their ideal wish or rather a status they longed for. During the interview, most students complained that there were no native English teachers at all to give lectures. The teachers, on the contrary, attributed the reasons for the limited availability of native English teachers to two aspects: this was first due to financial considerations and the fact that the few native teachers were

allocated to teaching English majors only; and the second reason might be that there was actually no need for many lower level students to have lectures given by native teachers because the level at which they were able to communicate or understand was rather limited. Thus, most teachers were doubtful about the extent to which native English teachers would help to improve listening skills for Level B students.

What is clear is that both students and teachers attached least importance to the involvement of Chinese English teachers whether they were giving lectures or participating in dialogue; and the teachers themselves scored this even lower than the students. It seems that the Chinese English teachers were regarded as the most unimportant component in the whole learning process of English Listening Comprehension and the teachers themselves admitted this. The teacher's role in English Listening Comprehension is further discussed in 5.3.4.

5.3.2 Listening Comprehension class teaching schedule

Ten steps of a 90-minute Listening Comprehension classroom session were suggested in 2.8.4. During the classroom observation, teaching procedures were different from these ten steps. Most of the time was allocated to text listening and activities associated with this. Some teachers preferred to start with new words and expressions; some teachers chose to start with prediction questions. Then students listened to the whole passage and did relevant exercises such as 'Blank Filling' and 'True-or-False Questions', after which teachers discussed these with students. Students wrote their answers in their textbooks, and the teacher usually named some students to read out their answers after the first listening. The teacher then typed in those students' answers via his / her own computer (teacher's terminal) and students could all see the answers on their computer monitor (student's terminal). The on-line exercises were exactly the same as those in the textbook. An example is shown as Script 5.1, below.



Script 5.1 An example of on-screen exercises

After checking the answers, the teacher played the text again but in sections; that is to say, the teacher usually stopped the recording immediately after the exercise-related part or when something difficult required an explanation; the third time, students listened to the whole passage again. The classroom hours were largely limited to these three activities: listening, doing exercises and checking. Table 5.1 provides an analysis of the seven classes (11 hours) observed.

Table 5.1 Teaching procedures observed in seven classes

Steps	Class 1	Class 2	Class 3	Class 4	Class 5	Class 6	Class 7
	45 min	45 min	45 min	90 min	90 min	90 min	90 min
1. Prelistening	✓				✓		
2. Pre-teaching of new vocabulary	✓	✓					
3. Extensive listening based on questions	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
4. Discussing answers	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
5. Intensive listening based on questions	✓	✓					✓
6. Discussing answers	✓	✓					✓
7. Further introduction of language or cultural background				✓	✓		
8. Extension activities involving extra listening or speaking tasks	✓			✓	✓	✓	
9. Review							
10. Tasks for the next 90-minute classroom session					✓		
CET practice		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Other tasks or practice				Introduction of Websites for practising listening comprehension		Students' presentation & video programmes	

All the observations took place a few weeks before a national CET examination; therefore, classroom hours were partly allocated to CET practice. One 45-minute-class focused solely on CET and the teacher reported that the next 45 minutes would be text-related listening. With regard to text-related teaching and learning, the content was not only the material from the textbooks, but also some supplementary cultural background introduction; or extended practice on listening or speaking; or introduction of extra learning materials from websites. None of the classes reviewed what had been learned and only one class was observed to prepare for the next session.

The observations also revealed that it was almost impossible for the students to

understand the complete passage by listening to it in the classroom. Teachers helped students' understanding by explaining the main idea and some important sections of the texts. Hence, when they claimed the text had been played 'enough', they meant they had achieved the aim they had set for themselves, and there was no need to go further. As Underwood (1989) states, however, it is extremely hard for a teacher to judge whether or not the students have understood any particular section of what they have heard. It was generally the teacher who declared 'That was difficult, so let's listen again' (p.17). Classroom observation in University S confirmed this statement. No student asked teachers to replay any part of the recording; it was the teachers who made decisions on whether to stop or what to explain.

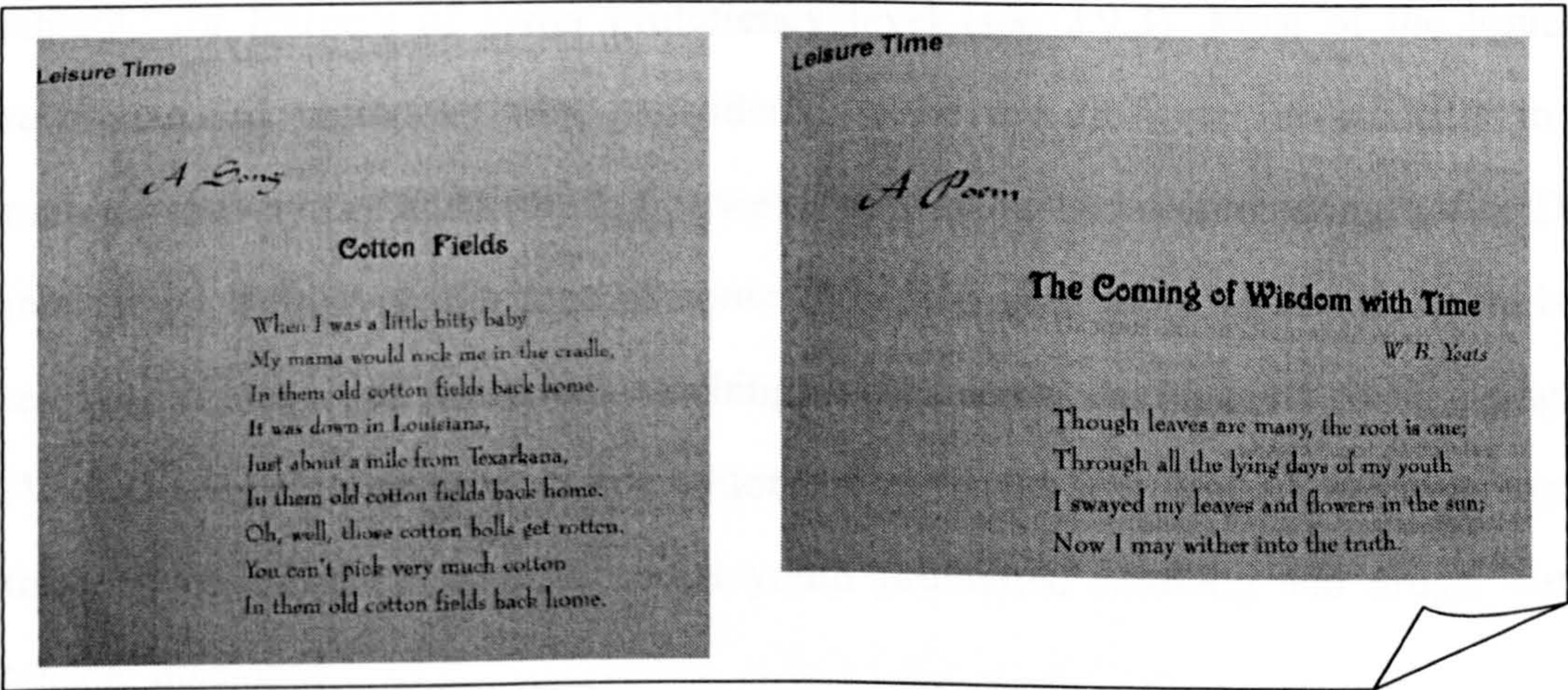
5.3.3 Listening Comprehension textbooks

As noted in section 2.8.4, Listening Comprehension can be improved in real life through exposure or in artificial circumstances such as the classroom, especially if authentic materials are used. Observation and interviews revealed that textbooks were seen as an effective medium, and the basis for much of the language input learners received and the language practised in the classroom. The textbooks recommended by the Reform and the series that was used in University S vary in certain way, but the basic steps in using them was similar. A 90-minute listening class can be organised as follows:

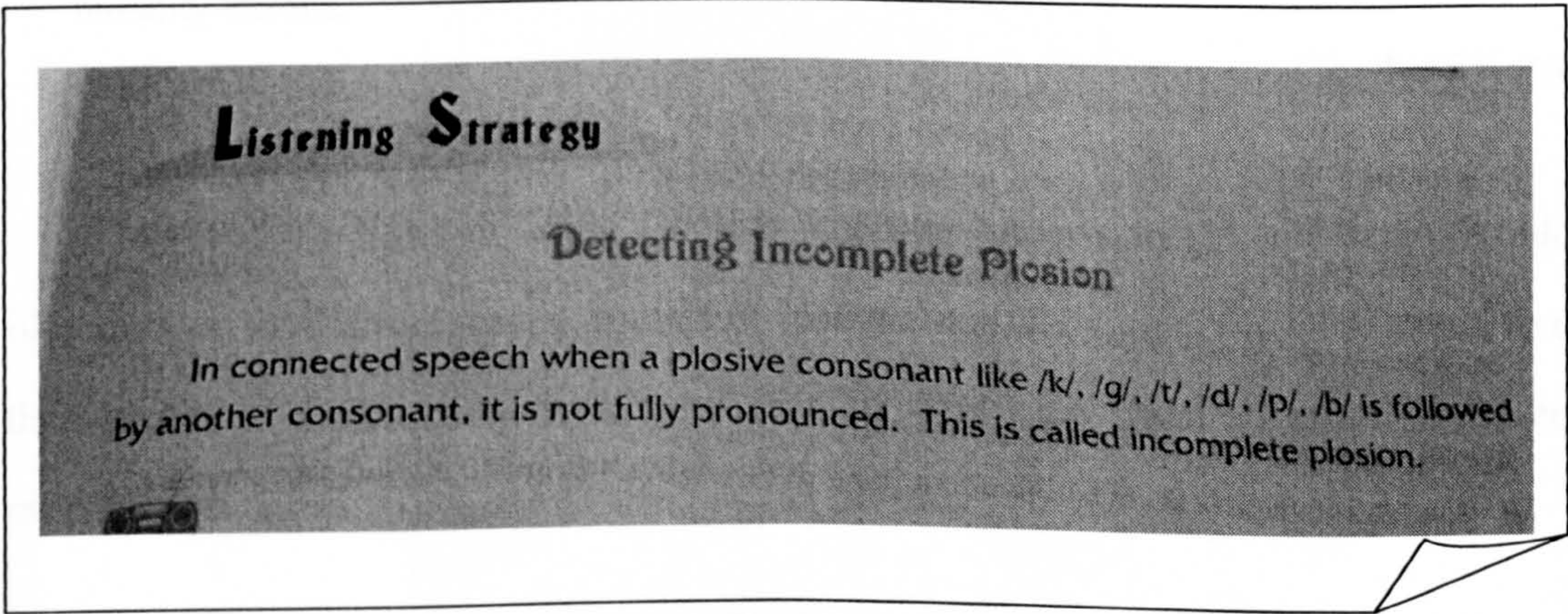
Pre-listening → While-listening → Follow-up

Most textbooks follow the above process and cover the first eight steps discussed in section 2.8.4, but there also exist some differences. The current Listening Comprehension textbooks ('New College English: View, Listen and Speak') include an additional activity for pre-listening: predictions. This requires students to predict what is going to happen later or what the outcomes might be. In one series of textbooks, there is 'Leisure Time' in the form of songs, poems, humour and anecdotes (see e.g. Clip 5.1). This is a follow-up phase designed to help students relax a little after each unit. In another series, there is a

test after each unit which simulates CET exercises. In a third series, there is a section on ‘Listening Strategies’ listing strategies such as focusing on speakers’ pronunciation and intonation (see e.g. Clip 5.2). As regards extension exercises and practice, most textbooks include speaking activities. For example, students are required to prepare individual presentations or to create dialogues on similar topics.



Clip 5.1 Examples of ‘Leisure Time’ in one textbook



Clip 5.2 An example of ‘Listening Strategy’ in one textbook

Of particular concern in relation to the teaching of listening (and reading) is the selection of topics and texts. The next sections first investigate the topics of the texts in both the recommended textbook series and the package used in University S; this is followed by full discussion of the difficulty levels of the texts used in University S.

Topics in textbooks

When the teachers in University S evaluated the topics in the textbooks recommended by the Reform, they stated that some topics were boring, depressing or homiletic, which also led to a negative reaction from students. Buck (2001) suggests that simple topics are suitable for learners of lower proficiency level (see 2.9.3). Most of the topics in the recommended textbooks were considered to be too difficult for students in general non-key universities and some topics were “depressing and uninteresting” (Vice Dean YY, interview). Moreover, the tone of some texts was seen as being overly moralistic. The texts were “regarded as serious teaching, which made the students reject being taught” (Vice Dean YY, interview). Some editors of textbooks and English teaching experts had thought topics should include social youth problems, smoking and drugs, but as one teacher disclosed:

“Students were fed up with those topics because they felt they were being educated with these morality lessons.”

(Teacher ZY, interview)

Conversely, editors or some English teaching experts might not expect students to like texts on agriculture, crops, forests or insects; but when students were asked to choose their preferred topics, these were very popular. The Vice Dean commented on students’ preferences:

“Those texts seem to be nice topics, for example, one text is about business which looks to be related to modern life, but.... The text is actually boring. Other topics on creativity, population and health are too profound for our students. The topics on cancer and violence are depressing with those pictures...”

(Vice Dean YY, interview)

Hence, University S gave up the four series recommended in the Reform and settled on the one from University Z. The choice of textbook seemed to be broadly successful, because 70% of teachers thought it was suitable for the students.

The difficulty levels of the texts

The textbooks used for classroom teaching in University S, ‘New College English: View, Listen and Speak’, were evaluated as good by students and teachers, but 44% of the students thought that there were some difficult texts. According to Rixon (1986), the difficulty level of any text depends on each person’s language development level and his / her background knowledge of the topic. The textbook series involved in this research was not one of the four recommended by the Reform, but was produced prior to the Reform. The teacher who was in charge of all English teaching in the University also stated: “We chose this series of textbooks after trying some others. It focuses on listening and speaking and it attaches much importance to activities” (Vice Dean YY, interview). Evaluation of the first edition, published in 1999, showed that it was too difficult for most of the non-key universities in China, and the difficulty level was reduced in the second edition, published in 2004. Figure 5.4 shows what current students think about the difficulty level of listening material in the textbook.

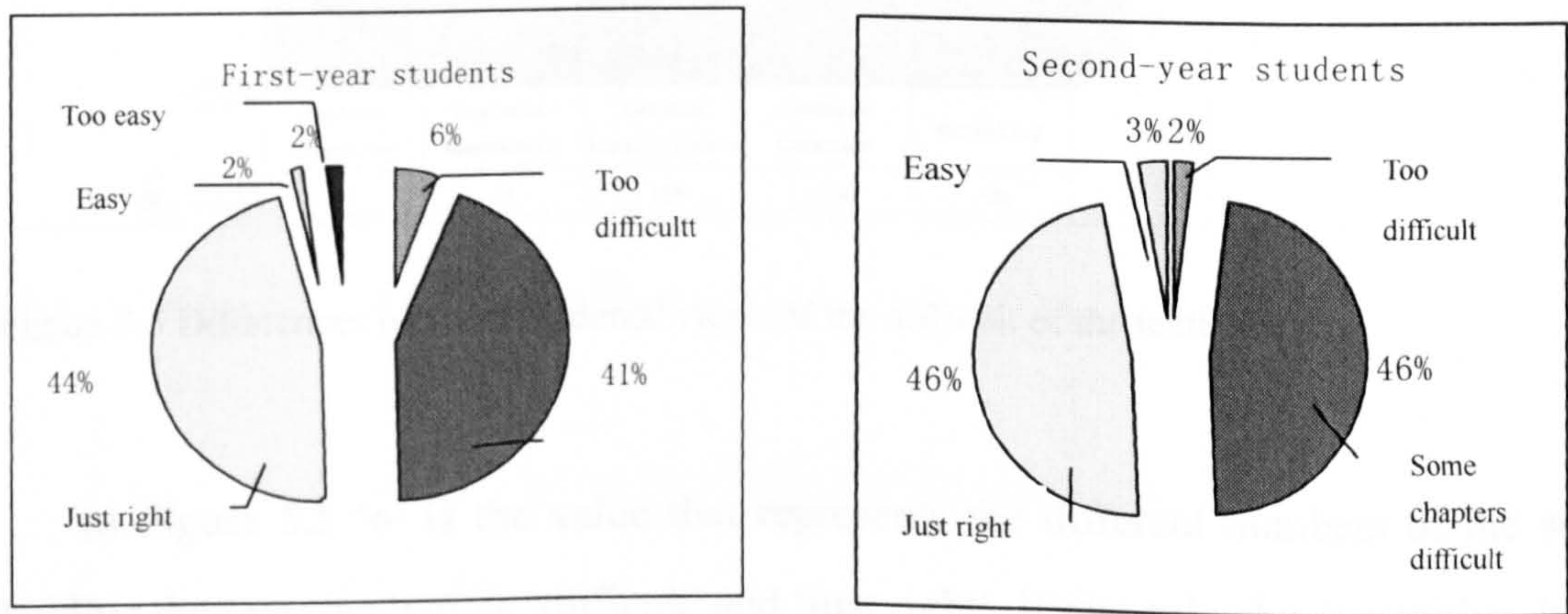


Figure 5.4 Difficulty level of the listening material in the textbook

From the above figure, there appears to be little difference between the views of first-year and second-year students. From the data available (some students did not finish the question), more than 40% of students felt that the texts in the textbook were just right for them, and a further 40% thought some texts were too difficult for them. Altogether,

only 3% (7 students), thought they were easy. Two first-year students evaluated the texts as ‘too easy’. Since the proportion of students who thought the material was of the right level was similar to that of students who thought some texts were difficult, this issue was further examined. In the classes majoring in Applied Chemistry, Business Administration and Chinese Linguistics & Literature, slightly more students thought some texts were difficult, whilst in the classes majoring in Japanese Language and first-year Marketing, more students agreed that the texts were just right for them. Figure 5.5 represents the difference in percentages of the numbers of students in each major who thought the texts were difficult and those who thought they were the right level of difficulty.

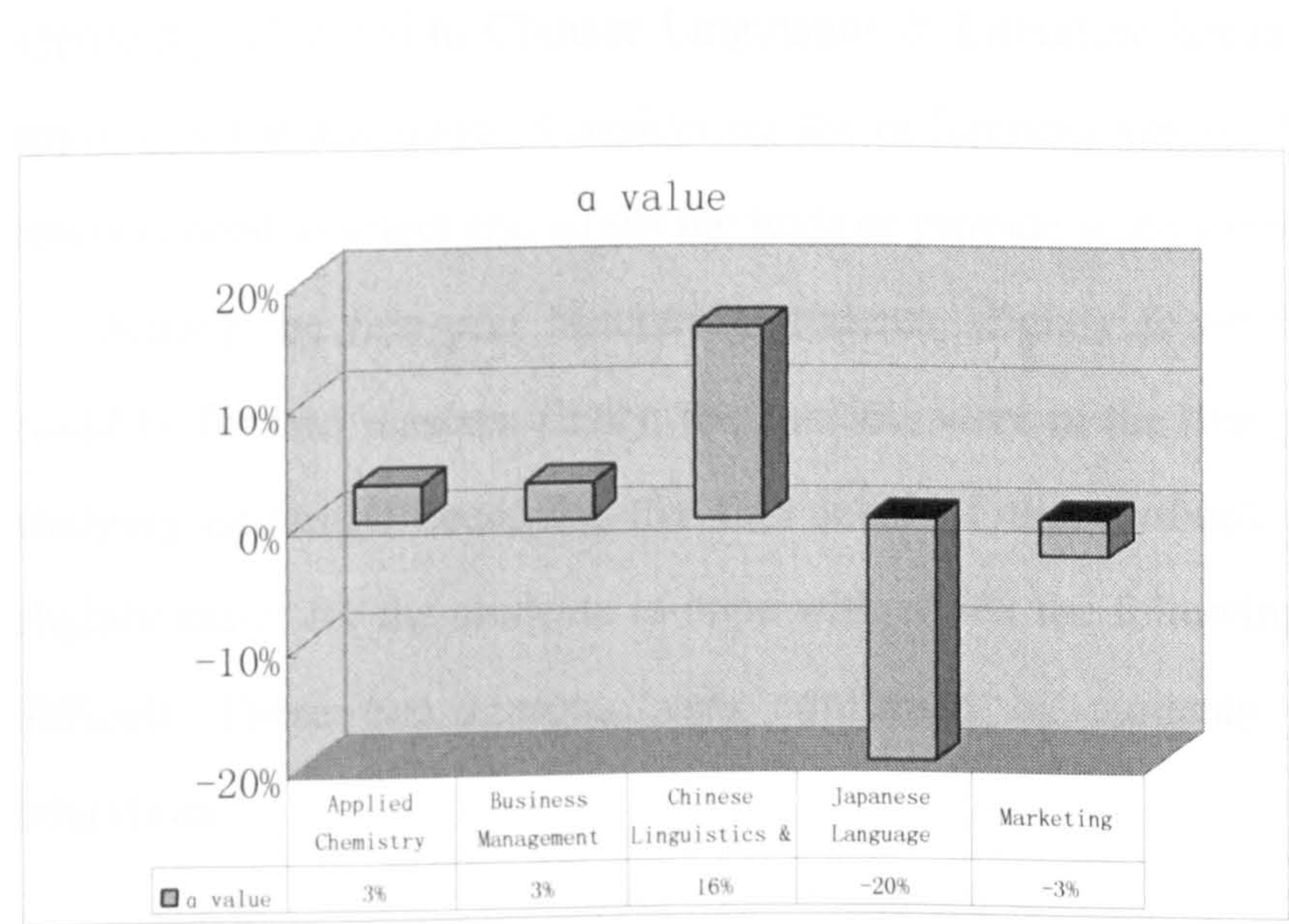


Figure 5.5 Differences between students’ views of the difficult of the textbook

In Figure 5.5 ‘a’ is the value that represents the different numbers of the students holding the two standpoints ‘difficult’ and ‘just right’. If the ‘a’ value is positive, it means that more students in that class thought some texts were difficult, and if the ‘a’ value is negative, it means that more students in that class thought the level was just right for them. Thus, within Applied Chemistry the difference was 3% in favour of difficult, whereas within the Japanese Language group, the difference was 20% in favour of just right, which means they found it easier to follow than students of other majors. There might be two reasons for this: firstly, the admission requirements in English were higher for

Japanese Language students than the others because of the competition for places, thus, they might be regarded as being more proficient in English; secondly, their major, Japanese, was also a foreign language, thus, they might have had better learning strategies that led to better learning outcomes. Interestingly, compared to the other groups, the percentage in Chinese Linguistics & Literature was rather high in favour of difficult; this might also be because the admission requirements in English were not high because this major was not that demanding. During interviews, each participant from this major pointed out that they ‘were allocated’ to instead of ‘chose’ to be in this particular major, which means they had applied for other disciplines but been rejected. Some students were apparently allocated to Chinese Linguistics & Literature because there were not enough applicants for this major. Considering the differences among the students, it seems that teachers need to select and adjust the texts or provide some supplementary materials.

Among the first-year Marketing students, slightly fewer found texts difficult. This could be for two reasons: firstly, the students were in the first year at university and still studying earnestly; secondly, the first level of the textbook of the whole series was slightly easier for the students to cope with whilst the following levels were increasingly difficult. These two reasons were confirmed by students and teachers during the interviews.

Evaluation of the textbook package used in University S

Figure 5.6 illustrates teachers’ evaluation of this textbook.

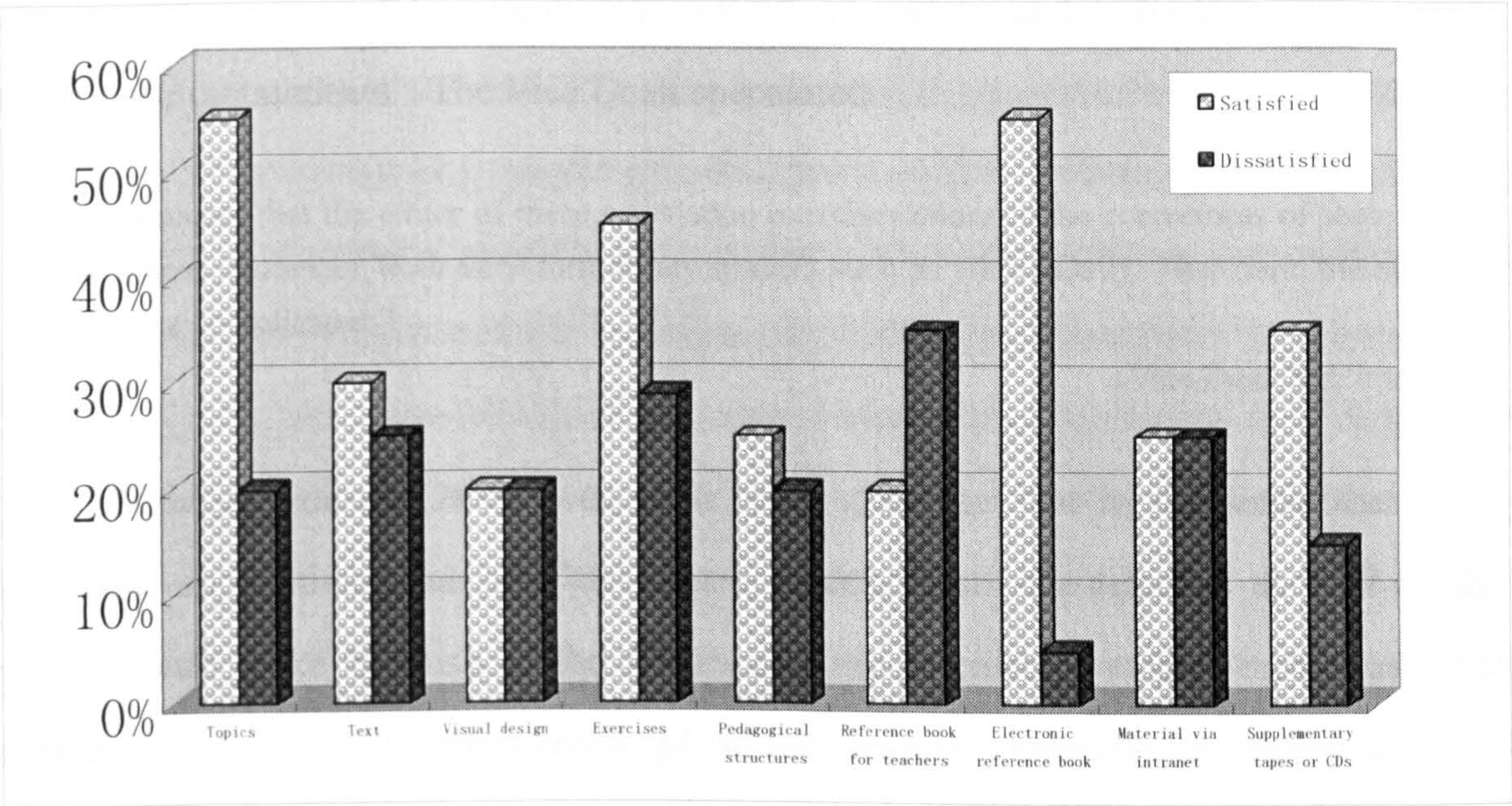


Figure 5.6 Teachers’ evaluation of the textbook

Figure 5.6 indicates that the most undisputed component was the electronic teaching reference book that accompanied the textbook, which most teachers evaluated as the most satisfactory part of the package. This included: background introduction to the texts, pre-reading questions, structure of the texts, translation and writing tasks. The package was designed and produced by a professional institute authorized by the textbook editorial group. As the chief editor of the textbook explained:

“The editorial group focused on the contents of the series of textbooks whilst the professional institute attached the most importance to the design to make the materials attractive and lively.”
(Editor HL, interview)

One teacher praised the provision of background information on the texts:

“I very much like the introduction of background. It is informative and saves our time searching for relevant background. Even when I need to search more, it serves as guidance.”
(Teacher DQ, interview)

The translation section came in for some criticism, however. Many sentences were considered to be long and complicated, and teachers anticipated that some students would not be able to cope with these. One teacher preferred to “select some sentences from the

Longman dictionary” (Vice Dean YY, interview) which, in her opinion, were “more suitable for our students”. The Vice Dean speculated:

“I presume that the editor of these translation exercises sticks to the correctness of sentences so they chose sentences from very formal newspapers such as China Daily. Therefore, the structure might be complicated.”

(Vice Dean YY, interview)

The second edition (2004) was even better than the first in the sense that some additional applications had been developed, which meant the teachers as well as the editors could make full use of the CWIS and the Internet to extend enormously the materials for learning. Teachers could upload new learning materials for sharing and later the students could also upload, through filters, the materials relevant to their interests. The teachers very much liked the multi-media teaching material which helped to introduce the background of the texts, to present the teaching points and to provide classroom exercises. However, this series had not yet been fully exploited because students in this university apparently did not even try some parts which were popular in another university. There were Word Games on the intranet for students to familiarise themselves with the vocabulary in each unit. These games were welcomed by students in University Z (Editor HL, interview) but apparently not in University S where the research was conducted because neither teachers nor students ever mentioned these games. It seems that students were not interested in these extra exercises even if they were labelled as ‘games’.

In contrast, the least satisfactory part was the non-electronic reference book. Compared with the electronic reference book, the non-electronic one followed a traditional mode with a grammar instruction key to the exercises. The layout of the traditional style reference book was also problematic because of the density of text on a page (a combination of font size and spacing). Though teachers were educated adults who were not supposed to care whether there were illustrations or not, they still hoped to use a book with an attractive, or at least not boring, appearance.

Most teachers also evaluated the topics highly. The chief editor of the textbook explained the process of topic selection and the changes that had taken place, following nationwide trialling, between the first and second editions. The topics were decided, to a

large extent, by the students themselves. Each student and teacher was asked to tick a rating for each text and each exercise. Those texts with lower marks from the evaluation were removed no matter how valuable the writers thought them. Some difficult texts were rewritten or revised by native English experts. Texts with similar topics were then grouped into the same unit and then ordered according to difficulty levels. The revised version had apparently been welcomed by most teachers and students.

Rational use of the textbooks

As discussed in 2.9.3, textbooks can be regarded as helpful support for the development of language learning (see e.g. Cunningsworth, 1995; Nunan, 1988), but they should not be the only focus of teaching and learning. One teacher claimed:

“Actually, Listening Comprehension can be practised without textbooks. There are so many other choices. But the topics from textbooks can be referenced because they were delicately selected.”

(Teacher JL, interview)

This teacher has studied in the UK and he suggested: “The textbooks from overseas can also be our textbooks, and we can enjoy the latest topics and genuine language” (Teacher JL, interview). Textbooks from English speaking countries are helpful because language is alive and developing, and numerous new words or expressions might occur with the appearance of new technology or social phenomena. Language is also closely related to cultural background. For example, the expression ‘*Big Brother*’ is almost synonymous with ‘Reality TV’ in the UK, but it might be meaningless to Chinese students. Hence, it is a valuable suggestion to adopt English textbooks from English speaking countries. However, these English textbooks also have disadvantages: they do not focus on the difficulties of Chinese students and topics may not always be of interest; therefore, textbooks from English speaking countries are more suitable to be used as supplementary materials.

The design of the textbooks, as indicated by the chief editor, “encourages the exploitation of the topics”. Hence, classroom activities can focus on the topics but should

not be limited to the textbook materials. There are three articles on one topic in each unit. Working on these makes students familiar with the language background and the vocabulary and consequently encourages them to be more willing, or more confident, to discuss the topic. Further practice can then take forms such as ‘role play’ or ‘scenario writing’.

Moreover, the effectiveness of the textbooks depends partially on how teachers use them. The chief editor explained:

“... So, this series of textbooks is excellent for excellent teachers, whilst for some conservative teachers, they could still be conservative. There are also some teachers who do not like the design, so they make amendments themselves to follow the previous teaching.”

(Editor HL, interview)

To sum up section 5.3.3, both students and teachers preferred to have informative and interesting topics for classroom teaching and learning, whilst other topics could be covered a little but not too much. It was also not unreasonable to cover those ‘*morality topics*’ in additional materials or in some other subjects but not as the major task for the English Listening Comprehension classes. In addition to the textbooks designed for Chinese students, those from English speaking countries can also be used as supplementary teaching and learning materials for a more alive language. In spite of the topics or the difficulty levels, textbooks and supplementary materials could still be effectively used by experienced or skilful teachers. The next section discusses the support from teachers for improving Listening Comprehension.

5.3.4 Support from teachers

Teachers’ role in English Listening Comprehension

One consequence of the Reform was that teachers were expected not only to ‘teach’, but also to offer much more support in relation to students’ learning.

16% of the students agreed that teachers were very helpful, and 57% admitted that teachers were helpful in some aspects. Teachers were asked what they saw as their roles in

the Listening Comprehension learning process. Figure 5.7 shows their responses.

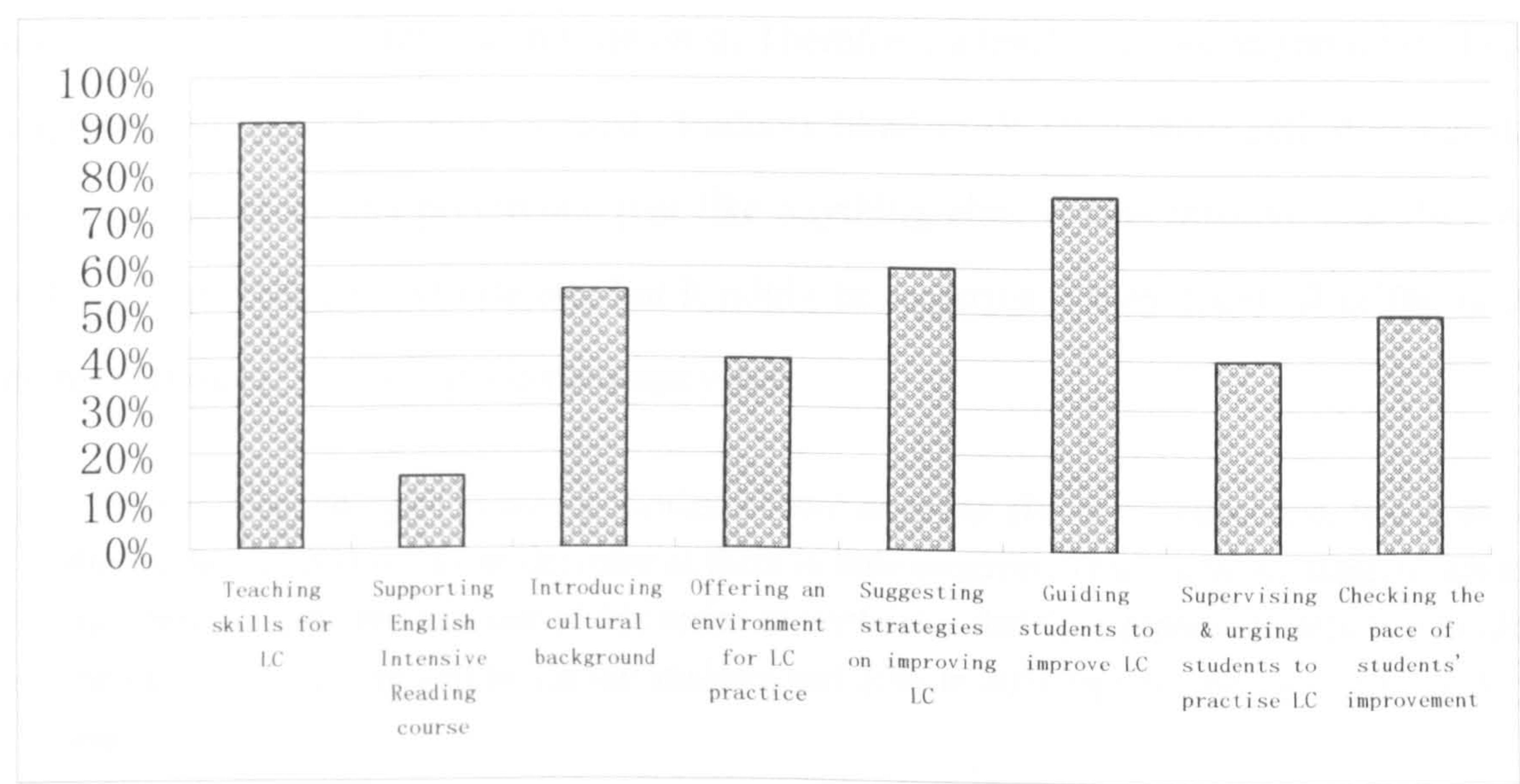


Figure 5.7 Teacher perceptions of the teacher’s role in Listening Comprehension

The figure reveals that 90% of teachers thought it was their responsibility to teach skills for Listening Comprehension and 75% of teachers also saw their role as guiding students to improve Listening Comprehension. The next choice was to *suggest strategies* on improving Listening Comprehension (60%). More than half the teachers also agreed that teachers should *introduce* cultural background and *check* students’ improvement. The least frequently selected option, but one nevertheless selected by 15%, was to support English Intensive Reading courses. Teachers’ actual classroom performance was observed and the findings are discussed near the end of this sub-section.

Teachers could be very helpful in organising activities for students to practise English. The Administrator said:

“Teachers play the vital role. If the teachers are captivating, the personal charm might be attractive enough for the students to be much more active. If the students can be spirited up by the teachers, they will be interested in learning English.”

(Administrator JY, interview)

As argued by Richards (2001), it is an essential skill for teachers to develop the available textbooks with their own practical experience (see 2.9.3). The chief editor of the

textbook also commented on the teachers' role: "Good teachers control their employment of the textbook very well". On one hand, teachers liked to have a textbook, but some teachers might spend too much time on it. Therefore, a textbook was required but there is a question of how the book is used. Students liked to do (language) activities but there were two sides of this preference just like anything else. It was positive that they were willing to participate and interact, but it might be negative if they spent all of the time in doing activities. The editor's comments were:

"It would be indulgent to have activities without anything else in the classroom. It is a waste of time. Their interest is sure to decrease as there is little progress. That's why we suggest, while we train how to make the best use of this series of textbooks, that 60% (approximately two thirds) of the classroom time should be for the students and 30% to 40% (approximately one third) for the teachers."

(Editor HL, interview)

The male teacher interviewed spoke about his contact with students:

"I spend much time with students. I prefer to know more about them and understand their life and their families. Thus, I am able to offer specific suggestions on their study."

(Teacher JL, interview)

This teacher had been an Education Advisor in a famous company before he came to this university, so he seemed to know more about career-related learning. Students were willing to accept his suggestions on English learning and competence developing. He said:

"Students will be products for society to choose and use. There will be some problems and I am willing to introduce some information and offer support and coordination. I hope our teachers do not become baby-sitters, or additional parents outside the family. I hope we can be friends, or advisors."

(Teacher JL, interview)

From his viewpoint, reading and writing were more important for some majors, whilst for others, listening and speaking were more important. He had overseas learning experience himself; therefore he was familiar with some native English websites. He preferred to present news that students did not usually see in Chinese newspapers or

websites and some brand new short comics, explaining this as follows:

“Thus, they might be interested in reading a piece of news in English. If they can get access in Chinese, they are not willing to try English.”

(Teacher JL, interview)

During the classroom observation, teachers' performances were studied to establish which roles they actually played. Most teachers observed gave suggestions on listening skills for the students. Teaching focused not only on skills to improve the capability of understanding the listening material, but also covered the skills required to deal with examinations. Not every teacher was observed to present the cultural background relevant to the texts, such as the historical origin of Thanksgiving in America. Some teachers made suggestions on how to improve Listening Comprehension, for example, skills for Listening Comprehension could be enhanced by going to English corner or visiting English learning websites. During the classroom time, almost every teacher frequently checked the students' progress.

Thus, teachers could be supportive during the implementation of the Reform in the sense that they teach skills for Listening Comprehension. Furthermore, teachers with overseas experience could draw on their knowledge of language and culture. The next section will explore teachers' application of multi-media facilities, the Internet and the intranet.

Teachers' ability to use the multi-media facilities, the Internet and the intranet

Since the Reform aimed to take advantage of the Internet and the intranet, the teachers were expected to:

1. learn to make use of the multi-media facilities themselves;
2. give instructions to students on how to use the facilities;
3. frequently communicate with students via the Net.

As to the first of these, only one teacher felt fully confident teaching with the

multi-media facilities such as a computer and the Internet. Approximately half the teachers were familiar with and confident in coping with these facilities. But one teacher admitted that she always encountered problems with the computer system during classroom hours. 80% of the teachers agreed that the IT staff were very supportive of their use of multi-media. During the classroom observation, IT staff frequently came into the classroom during the break time to check whether there was anything wrong or whether they were needed for technical support. Figure 5.8 shows how the teachers dealt with the technical problems during the classroom hours. 80% of teachers sought recourse to IT staff, and 20% tried to deal with the problems themselves. Hence, the multi-media facilities were properly applied in University S in the sense that the IT staff were supporting as regularly as possible.

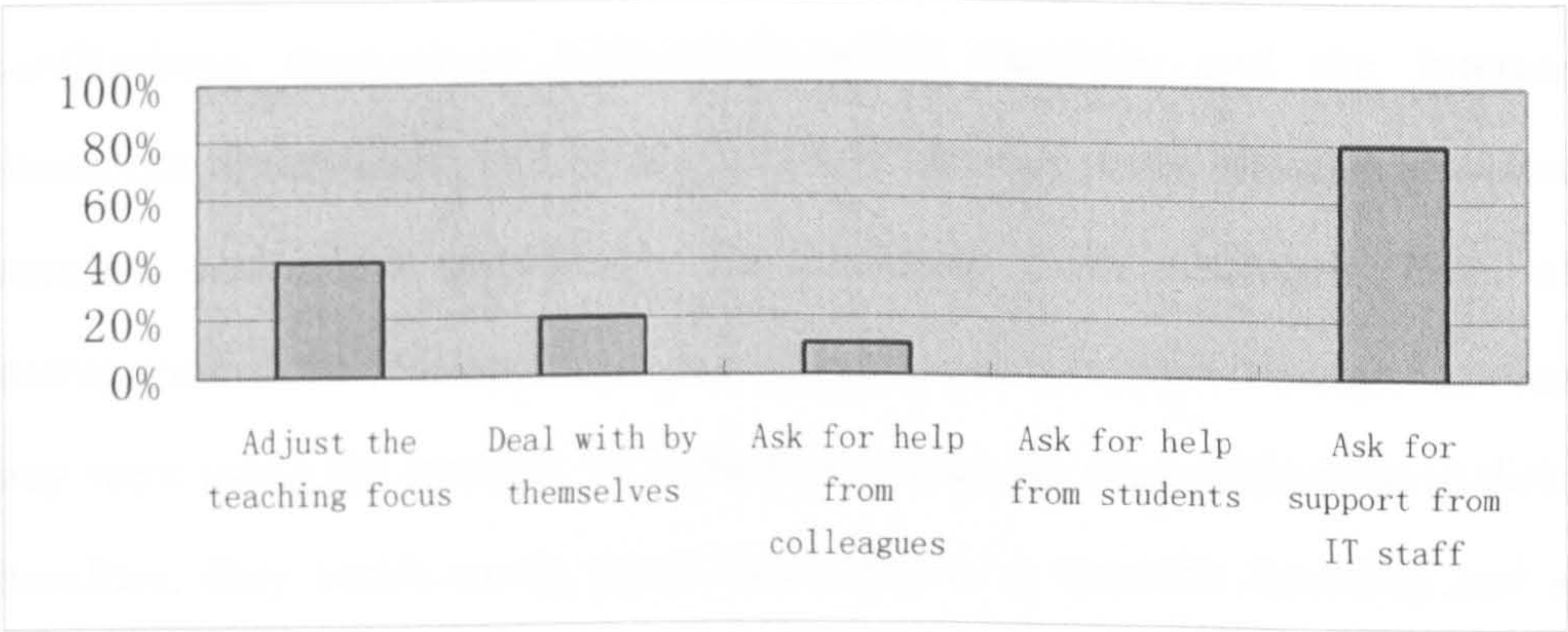


Figure 5.8 How the teachers deal with technical problems during the classroom hours

With regard to the second aspect, during the observation, just one teacher gave instructions on how to make full use of the multi-media facilities. Since not all teachers were actually capable of giving overall guidance, students turned to IT staff during the break time. Especially in the interactive computer rooms, teachers were not able to offer support on how to operate the computer to carry out specific tasks.

An even more problematic aspect was the lack of communication with students via the Internet. The data from the questionnaires shows that most teachers seldom arranged assignments via the Net (the Internet or the intranet). 45% of teachers had never set any assignments via the Net at all. 75% of teachers seldom got in touch with students via the

Net and 10% never got in touch at all. In this respect, teachers were quite slow to make use of the multi-media facilities. The Vice Dean also confirmed the slow progress in the teachers' application of the Internet and the intranet:

“Teachers were expected to group their students at the beginning of the semester and regularly log in to check how well the students had finished the quiz. I urged each teacher to check students' progress for each unit, and the daily completion of the quiz via the intranet should be part of the students' final score. But at the end of the first semester, there were still many teachers who had never used the Net to trace students' after-class-on-line-practice. They did not follow the instruction at all. Some teachers, mostly part time teachers, did not even check who their students were or group them at all.”

(Vice Dean YY, interview)

Despite this rather negative view, from interviews with both teachers and students, and from the classroom observation, it appears that more and more teachers were familiarising themselves with multi-media facilities and the Internet. During the classroom observation, two young teachers showed some interesting websites for English learning, and some specifically for Listening Comprehension. They offered detailed instructions on how to make the best use of these websites. Younger teachers reported that they were using the Internet for information and for communication in their own daily life; therefore, they could easily have more access to practise listening and speaking skills, which was subsequently introduced to the students. Some older teachers did not introduce internet-related learning resources. Comparatively, the younger teachers appeared more enthusiastic about contacting and communicating with their students via the network. One teacher, who has been teaching for more than twenty years, mentioned a QQ group for students to share learning materials. QQ is a synchronous chatting space and a QQ group is a group of people connected by the Internet. They chat, discuss and share topics of interest. It is one of the most popular chatting spaces in China. Group members can upload pictures, articles, cartoons, movies and flash for other members to share. It is a swift and reliable way to communicate. The teacher mentioned the help she had been given by a student 'monitor':

“Previously, I created a mailbox to upload some VOA news, but I failed because they were audio files. Later the monitor suggested QQ group; it was useful to upload short news such as one-minute VOA news for students to write down after class.”

(Teacher ZY, interview)

The male teacher interviewed had studied in the UK and often introduced some native English websites. He preferred to introduce various critical articles from different (English) websites on the same issue. One other younger teacher chatted with students, sometimes in English, via the Internet. She said the students were sometimes eager to chat in English on the Net. There were also three teachers who had set up their own website where students could share learning materials. One of them was updated frequently whilst the other two were not updated very often. The chief editor of the textbook also discussed the possibility of establishing a platform for the students to upload anything interesting; such as English anecdotes and pop songs. Therefore, the on-line learning resource would be, she felt, become attractive and more ‘student-orientated’.

In addition to the routine daily use of computer facilities, four teachers were also trained to supervise and support students using the interactive computer rooms. Every weekday afternoon, except for Tuesday which was teachers’ meeting time, two teachers were allocated to two interactive computer rooms to help students use and practise spoken English with computers. During the observation, most students came into the room around 1:30 pm, which was the starting time for afternoon courses, and also after 3:10 pm, which was the end of most afternoon courses. Students were enthusiastic about practising and teachers walked around from time to time to offer instructions and suggestions for them to improve their spoken English. However, teachers were not always able to solve the system problems, thus, technology staff were needed to work with the English teachers.

Keeping up with the pace was very demanding for teachers. From the classroom observation, it was clear that younger teachers were more familiar with multi-media facilities and they were more willing to communicate with students via the Net. Some older teachers, comparatively speaking, had not been used to multi-media facilities or the Internet and some of them were slow to get used to the new facilities. Thus, age did seem

to be a factor, but was not necessarily the causal reason for one's performance with multi-media facilities. One teacher commented on the influence of age:

“I do not think age is the most important reason. In my opinion, personality is the most important reason. One can start to use a computer even when s/he is sixty years old.”

(Teacher JL, interview)

The chief editor also concluded:

“Though I myself am an older teacher, I find older teachers are not quite as good at practical activities, or language abilities. However, they are quite professional in explaining. They have grasped outstanding knowledge about the language, so they prefer to adopt teaching methods such as an Intensive Reading course. Younger teachers are different, especially those who have lived abroad; they all like this series because of its interactive characteristics in nature.”

(Editor HL, interview)

5.3.5 Autonomous learning

Brindley (1984) argues that learners themselves should exercise responsibility for choosing learning objectives, content and method (see section 2.3). In this section, learners' autonomous learning in Listening Comprehension is discussed based on the following aspects: learners' listening strategies, practising Listening Comprehension after class, factors influencing learners' autonomous learning, and finally, an important causal factor is investigated: the gap in teaching and learning between high schools and universities.

Learners' listening strategies

The students were asked in the questionnaire about their strategies while listening to texts in class and answering questions. 26% said they hoped to understand every word; almost half (46%) agreed that they could not understand every word, so they tried to grasp the main idea; 22% usually looked at the questions first and just listened for information related to the questions; 8% admitted that they did not usually understand, so they just guessed the answers. Some used more than one strategy, and 2% selected the “do not

know” option. As regards the frequency of out-of-class practice relevant to specific English courses, most students (see Figure 5.9 and Figure 5.10) admitted that they seldom did any Listening Comprehension exercises after class, and 24% of them never practised Listening Comprehension after class.

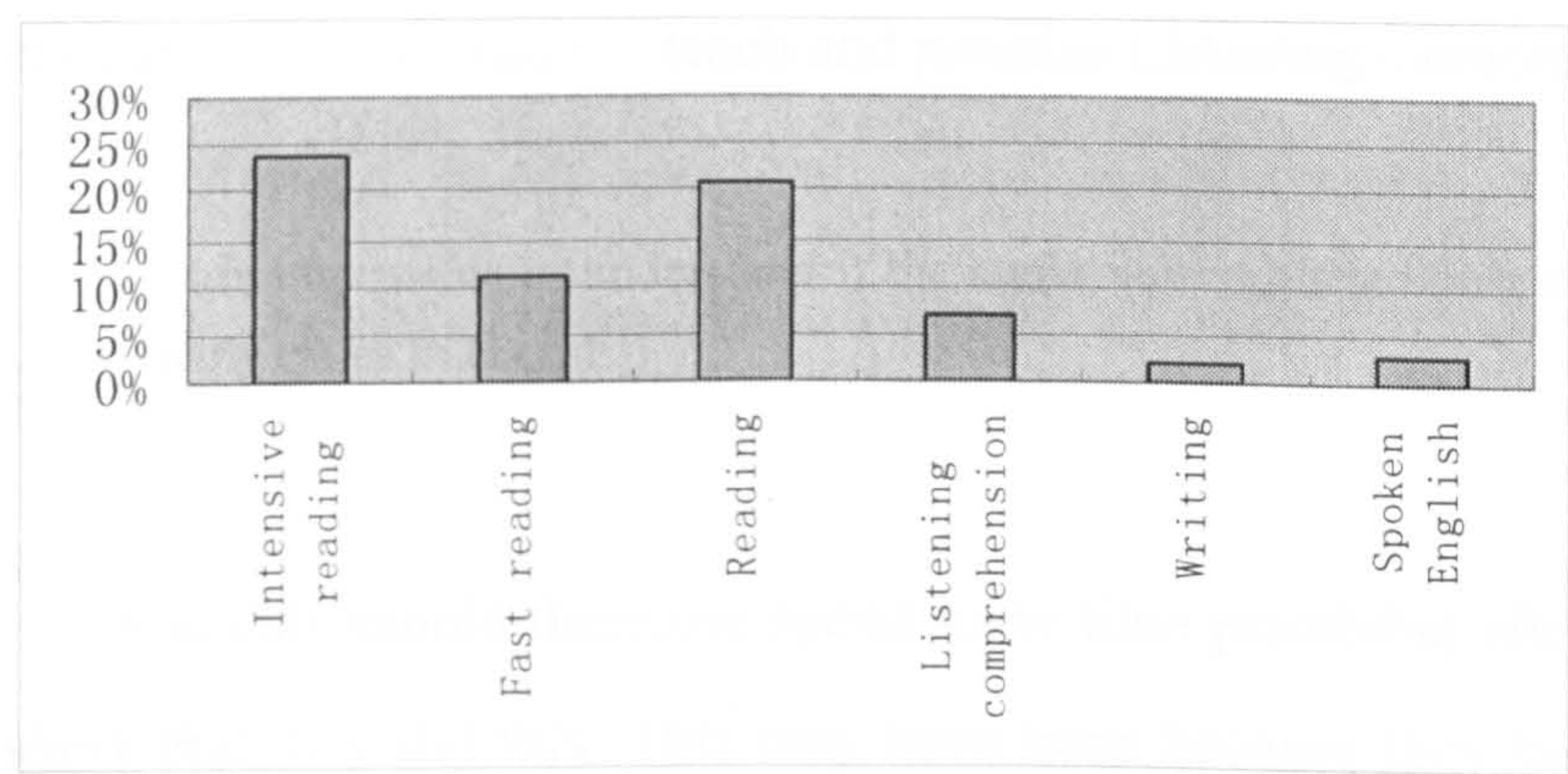


Figure 5.9 English courses that students prepared for

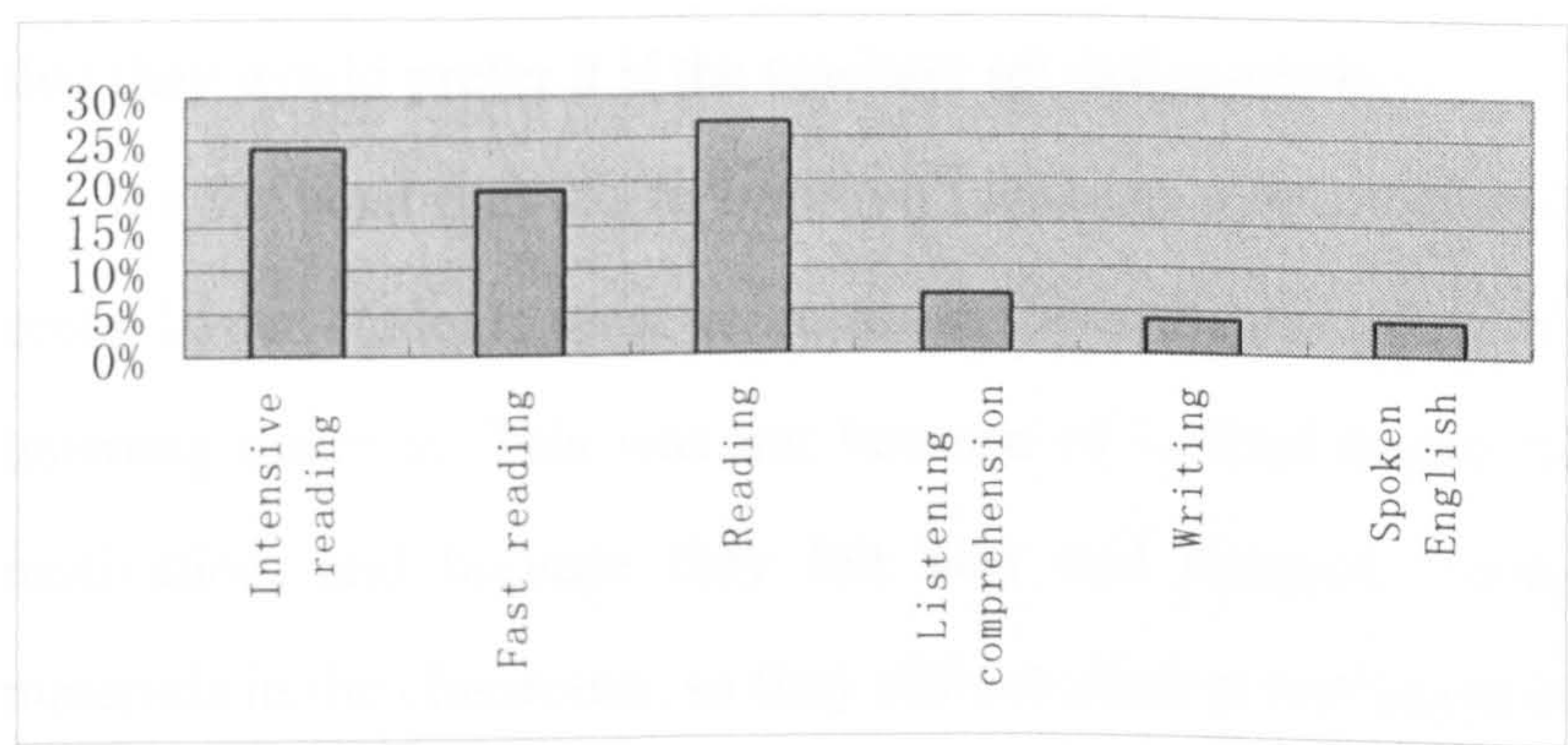


Figure 5.10 English courses that students did follow-up work for

It can be seen from Figures 5.9 and 5.10 that most students prepared for and did follow-up work for Intensive Reading, Reading and Fast Reading. Less than 10% of the students worked on Listening Comprehension outside the classroom.

Practising Listening Comprehension after class

The students were asked about their listening practice outside class. Only one student majoring in Biological Engineering claimed that classroom listening time was enough for him (Student 5, interview). All other students and their teachers claimed that there was not enough classroom time to teach and practise Listening Comprehension. One student said:

“It is impossible to understand if the audio tape is played only once, but it is impossible to play it many times in class.”

(Student 1, interview)

Students should therefore spend some time practising after class. But the data did not show that they did this. This may have been because they lacked the motivation; it may also have been a problem of self-organisation. It is relevant to note that only 10% were confident that they were able to organise their study of English effectively; 49% admitted that they were not sure about their self-motivation for learning English; and 19% agreed that they would prefer it if the teachers set assignments.

As for what they do to improve Listening Comprehension after class, both first and second-year students were reluctant to listen to the tapes of the textbooks or any other listening material. This was not because of limited access to listening resources, but of motivation, and because they felt they had listened ‘enough’ to the textbook-related materials in the classroom, so they did not think it was necessary to continue to listen after class. During the interviews, every teacher agreed that there should be no need to listen to the texts after class. They also stated that in their opinion the listening material of the textbook had been played ‘enough’ during the classroom hours, and students could be expected to familiarise themselves with input other than ‘formal teaching material’ outside the class. It was one of the aims of the Reform that learners would have more exposure to a variety of learning materials besides texts, and the textbook packages also offered large amounts of supplementary materials for Listening Comprehension. However, students spent their time neither on the classroom texts nor on supplementary learning materials.

The students also admitted during the interviews that none of them spent time on the textbook after class. One of them attempted to use the CD-ROM accompanying the textbook, but failed to get it to work on her own computer and gave up. One student claimed to have thought of trying the CD-ROM, but then ‘forgot’. The others admitted that they were not curious enough to even try it once. Classroom observation revealed that some teachers recommended websites where students could practise listening after class, but the students did not think they had enough time to take advantage of such resources.

Factors influencing learners’ autonomous learning

For most students in this and other universities, the use of English is mainly limited to classroom hours. One teacher evaluated students as having “very poor autonomous study habits” (Teacher XC, interview). She elaborated:

“The monitor in one of my classes, which is the best class I am teaching though they are Level B students, told me there were only six students who were actually studying. Seriously, there were only six of them. He explained a typical evening to me: every evening when they finish dinner, it is computer time. They are allowed to have their own computers from year two upwards, so they play computer games every day until midnight or even later. It would be an early night if they went to bed before one o’clock. So... how can we expect autonomous study?”

(Teacher XC, interview)

Other teachers held similar views about the lack of learner autonomy but offered alternative explanations:

“I think the reason for the lack of autonomous study is due to the lack of stimulation. How about increasing the percentage of listening during the term examinations?”

(Teacher DQ, interview)

“In my opinion, our students’ English level is the same standard as other students within the country. They gave up catching up with those who are better, at the same time, they felt relaxed comparing themselves to lower level students.”

(Teacher XC, interview)

It seems that some students were not motivated to improve their English listening competence. A breakdown of the major motivations mentioned by students is shown in

Figure 5.11

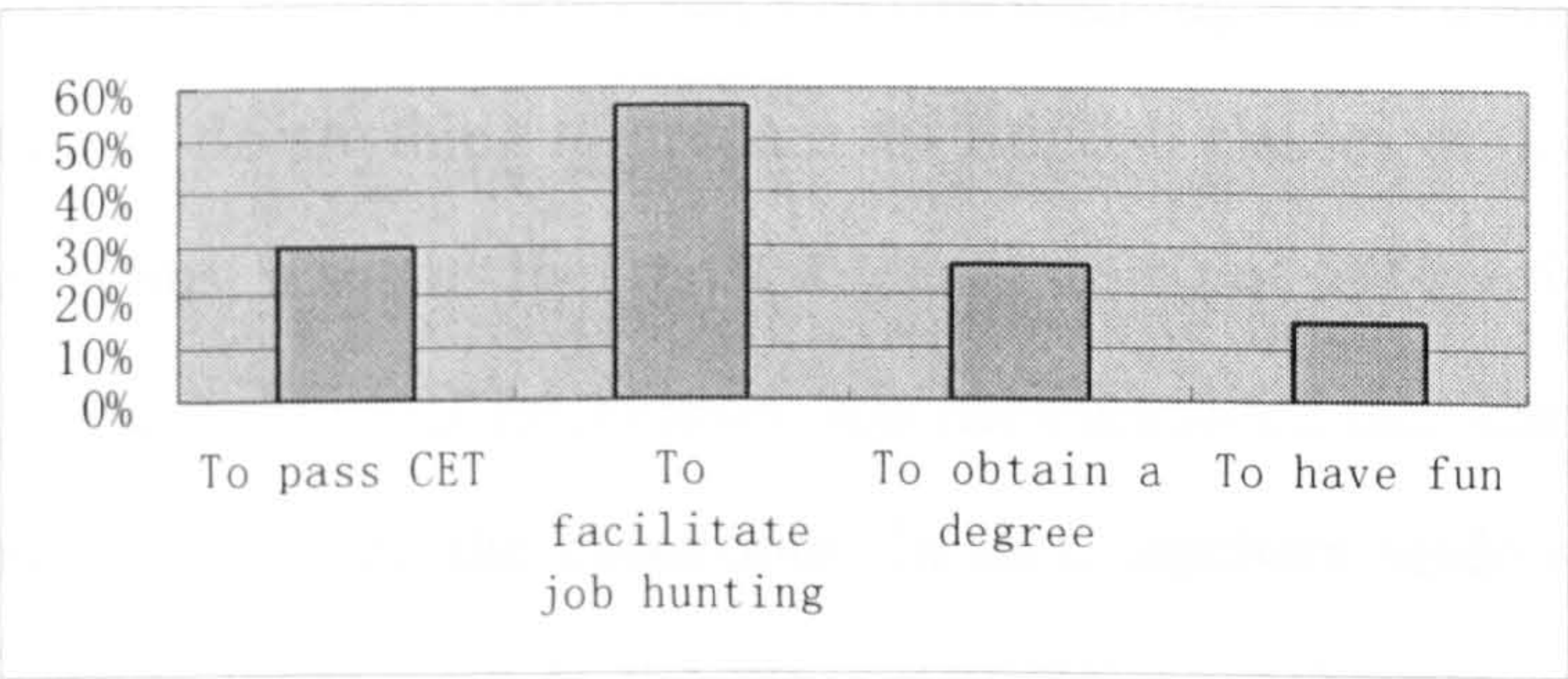


Figure 5.11 Motivation for learning English

One student claimed, “We are learning English for the only reason that we have to learn” (Student 2, interview), which is a view echoed by other students interviewed. It appears that she did not bother thinking about the reason why they learned English. Another student expressed this opinion:

“English is only useful for the purpose of graduation and finding a job, but only a small amount of graduates are competent enough and lucky enough to find a job demanding capability of English. Even those who are admitted to a career owing to their good marks of English are not necessarily using English in their routines or life.”

(Student 5, interview)

It appears that she hoped to find a satisfactory job with competent English ability, yet at the same time, she did not think English was really useful for a career. A second purpose was to pass the CET examinations, which will be further discussed in 5.3.6.

Only 15% of students found it fun to learn English. When explicitly asked whether they thought it was fun to learn English, 57% of the students said that they enjoyed it a little, whilst 24% admitted it was hard to learn English. One student exclaimed, “How could it be fun to learn English!” (Student 11, interview) and others acknowledged:

“I have never liked to learn it.” (Student 6, interview)

“I was interested in English at the very beginning, but later on my interests faded away... because I was not able to cope.” (Student 4, interview)

“I was interested in it when I was able to manage the exercises.”

(Student 3, interview)

For most students, however, English learning was a compulsory course, and they were reluctant to do anything to prepare for English classes or do any follow-up work after the classes. Thus, it seems that most students were not self-motivated to learn and use English. During the individual interviews, teachers admitted that they knew most students did not do anything outside the classroom. In fact, teachers seldom assigned any homework for the students to do outside the class. However, at the same time, teachers did not expect students to do textbook-related exercises on each English-related course. They suggested that practice on these aspects outside the class should focus on additional learning materials.

Students were asked why they did not learn and practise autonomously, whether it was because they did not know what to do or because they were reluctant to do anything even when they knew what they should do. Some students said:

“I do not know what I should do, there are so many things...”

(Student 6, interview)

“Even if I know, there seems no time for me to do. I can only manage the textbook.”

(Student 5, interview)

“Of course I know what I should do, but sometimes I feel bored, so I do not do anything on that day.”

(Student 14, interview)

It seems that some students were reluctant to do what the teachers expected even if they knew what should be done. Others admitted to “being lazy” (Student 11, interview) or “preferring to be more relaxed by playing games or sports” (Student 4, interview). From all these descriptions, learning seemed to be the last thing that students were willing to do. They did not bother to think about learning by themselves. The students were then asked about their opinion on ‘being spoon-fed by teachers while studying’. Every student interviewed (altogether 15 students) said they preferred to be spoon-fed by teachers. They were asked what they hoped to have in Listening Comprehension classes, but they had no expectations or curiosity concerning what the teachers did during the class; they simply

“learned whatever teachers present” (Student 5, interview). After class, they had no idea what to practise:

“It would be better if teachers tell us what we should learn and practise, or set assignments.”
(Student 1, interview)

One student described her preference for being spoon-fed by teachers:

“I know where I can find something to learn and practise but just... I won’t ... I won’t do it if I am not pushed. We are used to being spoon-fed by teachers instead of looking for materials by ourselves.”
(Student 8, interview)

Some students might understand very well what they were expected to do by teachers, but they were still not motivated to do it.

“I have been to some other universities to sample their lectures. My point is, there is not a big difference in teaching methods. The most important aspect is students themselves. University students are supposed to study autonomously.”
(Student 13, interview)

“I know that English major students are studying very hard, they are memorising, listening and speaking every day. They do preparations and reviews everyday. That is good, in fact, I think, they might be studying even harder than in high school, because learning English is their major task. But we are not English majors, so there is no need for us to do so.”
(Student 15, interview)

This indicates that students had got used to studying under pressure when they were in high school, especially when they were being pushed to prepare for university Entrance Examinations in Grade 3. However, they felt lost as freshmen at university as the life was “so relaxed” (Student 14, interview). Moreover, they did not bother to think about what they should learn or how they should learn. One teacher described the situation as follows:

“It is true that we are feeding some students. My students are all Level B students. The fact is that when we stopped feeding students, they stop learning immediately. For Level A students, the situation might be better, as I think they may be learning how to use the language.”
(Teacher XC, interview)

Another teacher claimed:

“Most of our students are economically rich at home, thus, they do not have a specific goal to achieve. They do not know why they are learning. Some of them, I would say, they were brought here by their parents. I have had contact with students from upper-level universities, and I have found that they knew they were studying for their future, but generally, from my observation, many students all over the country do not see their studies as relevant to their future.”

(Teacher JL, interview)

It is true that social factors affect students' learning attitude. In the current teaching system, or social system, our young students do not think their future is determined by whether they are studying enthusiastically or not. The Vice Dean argued:

“We do not actually expect our students to study English autonomously, they are not English majors. I would like them to study with instruction from teachers and work properly. Do you expect our students to study autonomously? I really don't think so. Even teachers from Beijing University are complaining that their students are not learning autonomously.”

(Vice Dean YY, interview)

As this implies, it is socially accepted, to a certain extent, that many students in China are not ready to learn autonomously, and some students might take a more autonomous approach to their majors than to English. In order to get students to be more active, the Vice Dean preferred the notion of ‘semi-autonomous study with teachers' instructions’, which is similar to Chen's (2006) suggestion of ‘limited autonomy’ (see 3.3.1) and Liu and Kong's ‘CALL + Class Instruction’ (see 3.3.2). What teachers could do, in her view, was to tell students what they should work on with certain criteria, and they should follow these instructions. It would then depend on the individual how they worked and how much they did. In relation to developing their listening skills, they could make their own decisions on when and where to listen, how many times to listen and how much to understand in each listening text. She also suggested that two large computer rooms with 100 seats in each room be made available. Students would be recommended to be in those two rooms at a certain time, but teachers would not be there to instruct them; instead, the purpose would be to push students to study ‘semi-autonomously’ with some guidance from teachers. In this way, students might study more and more autonomously.

The Administrator did not hold the same opinion:

“Feeding is not suitable for the students in our University (one of the top universities). They would like to show their individuality, and they prefer to speak and talk. As for those students in the less-perfect universities, the teachers, I think... it seems that... but I do not think they would listen to the teachers as well if the teachers are talking all the time. The students nowadays are vigorous,... they are mostly self-centred.”

(Administrator JY, interview)

Hence, the conclusion might be drawn from the Administrator as well as the Vice Dean that lower level students were more used to being ‘fed’ by teachers and they waited to be instructed what to do and how to do it. Higher level students such as those in top universities preferred to express their individuality and be more independent. This conclusion is similar to that of Wang’s (2005) study (see 3.3.1).

The Chief Editor of the textbook also gave an example of a more active attitude towards learning English: “One thing is for sure that the students are much more motivated nowadays”. She shared her experience concerning a text on music in the first edition. She knew very little about that topic. The only thing she knew was rock and roll, and only from the text had she learned the term ‘blues’, which meant teachers’ knowledge might be quite limited. So it was suggested that students could search for the relevant information. When they were asked who was willing to present on the topic, one student volunteered; he was an expert on music. He prepared well and everybody was impressed. He played samples of each type of music, which was an interesting experience for everyone. Therefore, the Chief Editor thought there were many more active students than before: “That would have been impossible during the old days” (Editor HL, interview).

When asked how long it would take for autonomous study via the Internet / intranet to be realised, most teachers suggested five to ten years. One vital factor identified was the role of the Educational Administrative Office and whether it was supportive or not. The realisation of autonomous study called for substantial investment in equipment and facilities, and hundreds of thousand of pounds would be needed. Secondly, it called for cooperation from teachers and students after the required facilities were installed. The Administrator was also pessimistic:

“A lot of uncertainties exist. I am afraid that there is a long way to go with considerable pullbacks.”

(Administrator JY, interview)

The Chief Editor’s view was ultimately positive:

“I cannot name how many years, but one thing is for sure that students nowadays are more and more motivated and active than before.”

(Editor HL, interview)

The authorities were anxious to make a change by introducing the Reform in the hope that the students would develop the capacity for autonomous learning and the ability to use English in an all-encompassing and comprehensive way. Students of higher English levels were more willing to develop all-round abilities. However, some students with lower English proficiency did not acknowledge the role of English in their future career so that they were not motivated to practise listening or speaking. Furthermore, many students were not ready to learn autonomously because of their expectation of being spoon-fed as they were in high schools. The next section will look at the gap in teaching and learning between high schools and universities.

The gap in teaching and learning between high schools and universities

Liu, Ke and Liu (2005) and Zhu (2005) argue that many students had already been used to test-orientated learning before they came to universities, so they were less autonomous than expected (see 3.3.1). The gap between high schools and universities was also investigated in this research. The number of first-year students who reviewed after class (52%) was slightly more than those who did not (48%). The number of second-year students who reviewed after class (38%) was less than those who did not (52%). It seems that when students started their university studies, they still worked hard on English, but the time they devoted to this gradually reduced. One reason was that they had more courses relevant to their majors after they started their second year; hence they spent less time on English learning. The students confirmed this inference during the interviews.

Furthermore, it seemed that it was not necessary for them to devote much time to English learning at university. One student reported that they “are using the knowledge they obtained during high school and it seems that they could cope with the university English learning with the high school knowledge” (Student 15, interview). Three reasons for this finding were drawn from interviews with students:

1. The teachers in high school were much more controlling than teachers in university;
2. To achieve high scores for university Entrance Examinations was the priority during high school study;
3. English had been regarded as useful for the future (before they made a decision on their majors at university).

Teachers also realised the changed learning attitude. The vice-dean commented as follows:

“When the students were in high school, they were urged to study English as their main target (and some other subjects) for being admitted into university. Therefore, once they succeeded in obtaining a place at university, some of them relaxed and subconsciously believed they had completed their task. At that stage, some of them set up a new target to progress with at once, but others got lost in their study or did not even realise they should have a new goal to pursue.”

(Vice Dean YY, interview)

What this implies is that all the teachers should be responsible for clarifying the difference between high school learning and university learning, and reminding students of the necessity of setting a new target for the future. The Chief Editor of the textbook emphasised:

“Students are not unchangeable. They could be shaped by their teachers. ... But it is very important that teachers should frame this type of learning at the very beginning.”

(Editor HL, interview)

This section investigated reasons for the lack of autonomous learning. One of the

most important reasons was that many non-English majors did not recognise the use of English in their future career, so that they were not motivated to learn English, or to develop all-round English abilities such as listening and speaking. Furthermore, students had already got used to being spoon-fed by teachers so that they were reluctant to adopt self-directed learning.

5.3.6 Campus English broadcasts for the purpose of enhancing Listening Comprehension

In addition to the Internet and the intranet, University S also offered campus English broadcast time every day as a supplementary opportunity for students to listen to Spoken English. The schedule of the programmes was described by the Editor, who is one of the College English teachers, and who was running the programmes with some second-year students. Previously, the programmes had been broadcast from 8:00 am to 9:00 am, during which time some students were having classes whilst others were in their dorms. At the time the research was carried out, the programmes went out at an earlier time, from 6:30 am until 7:30 am, which was still a problem because students were busy with their morning routines such as washing and breakfast. The evening broadcast was from 7:30 pm to 9:30 pm. The teacher suggested:

“I think it might be more welcome if the programme can be played around the clock, therefore, students can choose what time to listen. However, I am not sure whether the equipment can survive (if it is under operation around the clock).”

(Teacher JL, interview)

He then explained the purpose of setting up such a broadcast:

“It is impossible for students to understand everything but we hope that it offers an excellent learning environment because they themselves will not search for learning materials.”

(Teacher JL, interview)

The radio programme had only been running for about one year, and there were considerable problems. The Editor reported:

“First of all, it calls for more attention from the University, from the students and also from us editors. Secondly, being the broadcasters, these students should be developed more for better performance. Thirdly, it is a time-consuming task, therefore, the quality cannot be guaranteed when the student broadcasters are busy studying. Fourthly, I am not available to manage everything in detail because I have courses to teach.”

(Teacher JL, interview)

Moreover, there were also problems from the listeners. Every student was aware of the existence of the English radio, but no one was sure about the exact time of the broadcast. They thought these were ‘in the mornings’ and ‘perhaps in the evenings’. But during these time periods, they were “either having classes or having meals” (Student 10, interview). One male student questioned the logic of the arrangements:

“How is it possible that one listens to English radio if the computer is available?”

(Student 4, interview)

It appears that he did not see any value of the campus English broadcast because he spent his spare time on the computer. During the interview, no one was sure what the programmes were about; only one female student reported:

“I tried once or twice, they sounded like CET exercises.”

(Student 14, interview)

The programmes were actually not only CET exercises as students had thought; there were four sections:

- News: this section played the latest news.
- Stories: the same short story was broadcast every day for a week and long stories were broken down and played over a few days or even a few weeks.
- Music and Songs: this section introduced music and musicians, songs and singers, and sometimes short plays. This section was supposed, by the Editor, to be the most popular part of the broadcast because students could enjoy popular songs without any pressure related to their study.
- Learning English: simple language was used to explain grammar to support English learning.

It seems that the effect of campus English radio was weak because students did not even know what it was about or when it was played.

5.3.7 CET (College English Test) in the Reform

CET pass rate

In China, to pass examinations and tests is one of the most important goals of teaching and learning for both teachers and students. Test-orientated teaching-learning was opposed by the authorities yet is still unavoidable. The CET was designed as a criterion to check university students' English teaching and learning. As the Chief Editor commented, tests are not 'representative', they are just 'sampling'. There is a need to have criteria to evaluate learning, but our aims should not be only to meet this criterion. In reality, the CET has been treated as more than a language test; it has also been set as an essential 'passing line' or yardstick for making judgments and decisions when evaluating universities, teachers and students. It is therefore inevitable that practice on CET exercises is seen as essential in many universities, and the changes in the CET have had a knock-on effect on teaching and learning in these universities. Most universities struggle to enhance their CET pass rate. Hence, teaching and learning is still test-orientated to a certain extent, in spite of the fact that the Reform aimed to give more emphasis to the practical use of English. However, one teacher argued:

“Yes, we are putting much emphasis on the CET, but it is not necessarily contradictory. CET exercises can also help improve competence. We are meeting the requirements of students while we do CET exercises. It might be even better if we explicitly allocate time for intensive CET courses within certain periods.”

(Teacher XC, interview)

Another teacher expressed a similar opinion:

“The weak points of our students are vocabulary and translation. I think, we are teaching for this purpose.”

(Teacher DQ, interview)

That is to say, when students practised for the purpose of the CET, they also developed their vocabulary and translation skills to enhance their English proficiency.

Only a few universities have been exempted from the ‘CET pass rate’ because the ‘pass rate’ of their students had reached 85%. In the Requirements for College English learning and teaching, no specific CET pass rate is stated as a basis for exemption, and the administrative office affirmed more than once that the CET success rate should not be critical in evaluating a university, in ranking universities, or in evaluating a graduate. Nor should it be seen as the basic requirement for graduation. Despite this, it is used as a ‘default’ measure in assessing how outstanding students are and how outstanding universities are. In fact, the whole society makes judgments based on the CET. Some teachers exerted themselves to raise students’ CET results in order that they could finally be exempted from this examination and focus freely on developing students’ ability to use English in an all-round way. University Z is one of those universities that have been exempted. The Administrator said that it had taken many years of struggle before the university had achieved this goal. Now, their students were no longer required to take CET 4 or CET 6 and teachers had considerable freedom. Students took CET examinations according to their own interests or own requirements. As stated by the Administrator:

“We could arrange our own classroom teaching as well as the teaching emphasis. We could put the emphasis entirely on listening and speaking. There would be no objection from the students, at the same time the teachers also consider that it caters to the social requirements.”

(Administrator JY, interview)

In most universities, however, students are required to take CET 4 and CET 6. The differences between universities with ‘invisible pressure’ from the CET pass rate and those without are shown in Table 5.2:

Table 5.2 Differences between universities with ‘invisible pressure’ related to CET pass rate and those without

Differences	Universities with ‘invisible pressure’ related to CET pass rate	Universities without ‘invisible pressure’ on CET pass rate
Features of classroom teaching	Teachers focus on CET exercises and textbooks	Teachers focus on culture/background information and textbooks
	Limited, or no chance to practise spoken English	More chances to practise spoken English
	There are classroom hours devoted exclusively to CET exercises	CET examination skills are practised for limited period before exam
	Students prefer to do exercises. They are less interested in other aspects of English competence.	Students prefer to practise and show their ability to use English in a well-rounded way
After class practice	Mainly CET exercises	Various materials for English learning

Practising Listening Comprehension for the CET

In University S, many students were learning and practising Listening Comprehension because of the CET. One student recalled:

“When we were in senior high school, we had a Listening Comprehension class almost every day during grade one and grade two. I believe that my listening ability was OK at that time, but later, when we were told there would be no Listening Comprehension in the Entrance Examination for University, all the practice on Listening Comprehension ceased immediately. Therefore, we lost the chance to listen.”

(Student 3, interview)

In the eyes of this student, it seems that if the Listening Comprehension section had remained in the Entrance Examination for University, students would have had more incentive as well as opportunities to practise their listening before they started university. Hence, examinations or tests can be seen as directing teaching and learning. To reflect and evaluate appropriately the outcomes of the revised Curriculum Requirements, the College English Test (CET) has also been revised, as described in Chapter 1. As part of the research reported here, teachers and students were asked their opinion on CET in questionnaires and interviews. Students were convinced about the importance of the CET;

some said they were aiming exclusively at CET and nothing else. Their explanation was that during job interviews employers focused on whether or not applicants had passed the CET. CET has even been regarded as a basic requirement for citizenship applications. A report in February 2008 (Beijing Personnel Bureau) disclosed that one must have passed CET Band 4, if his / her major was not English, when applying to be a citizen of Beijing. Most teachers (75%) agreed that the CET examination was still leading classroom teaching for College English. Moreover, 70% of the teachers also agreed that, to a certain extent, the CET provided an appropriate measure to assess the students' English proficiency, though 20% disagreed with this (Figure 5.12). This result is similar to that of Liu and Dai's (2004) research (see 3.1.3).

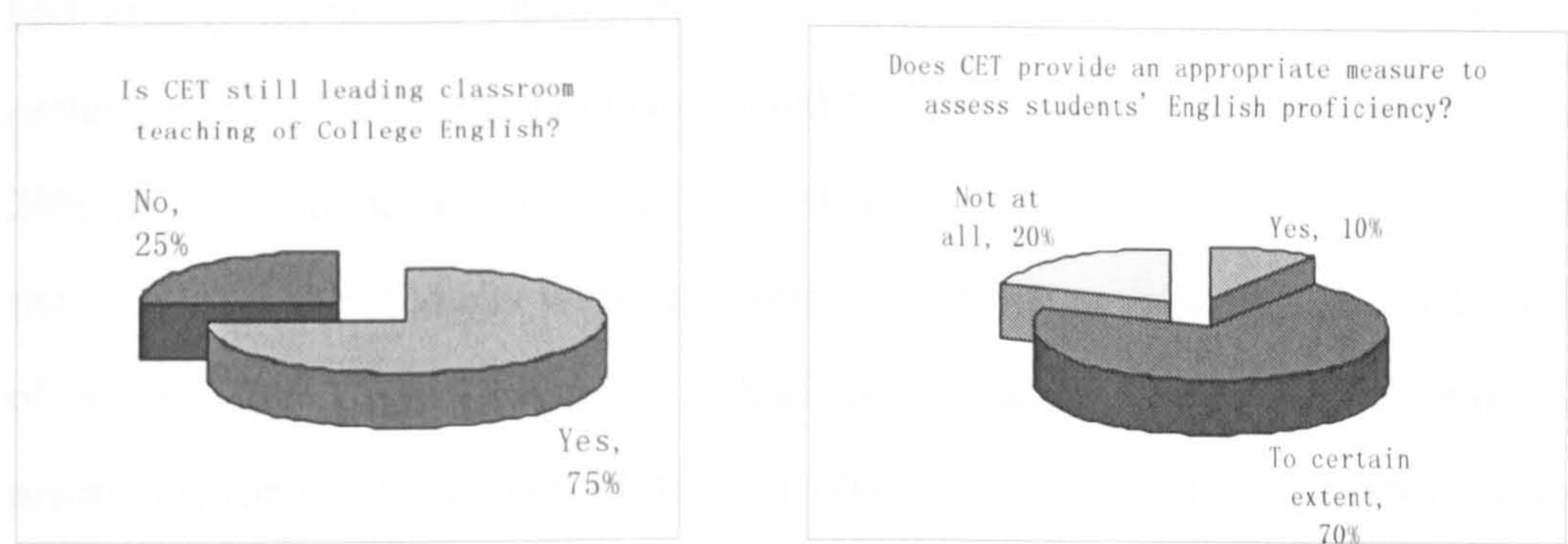


Figure 5.12 Teachers' views of CET

Students were also 'pushed' to practise more after class because of the CET. When asked whether they would learn and practise autonomously after class, students gave these opinions:

"I would have done nothing at all if there was no CET."
(Student 1, interview)

"The percentage of Listening Comprehension in new CET is more than the previous one, so we have to practise more on this aspect."
(Student 12, interview)

"Sometimes, I listen to CET exercises via mp3 before sleeping time."
(Student 8, interview)

One student also expressed his desperation about the CET:

“The requirement has been enhanced so much, I feel..., it is impossible for me to pass at all. I give up.”

(Student 6, interview)

As one teacher concluded:

“Owing to the increased proportion of Listening Comprehension in the CET test, they are sure to be influenced. It is for sure that they will spend more time listening.”

(Teacher DQ, interview)

Influences on teaching and learning Listening Comprehension from the CET reform

With regard to the reform of the CET, 45% of teachers agreed that the CET reform had greatly influenced classroom teaching, whereas 35% only acknowledged this to a certain extent. All the teachers confirmed that the increased weighting for listening (from 20% to 35%) made the students, as well as teachers, put greater emphasis on listening; that is to say, the students were spending more time on listening, at least for the purpose of passing the CET. University S had also arranged some extra classroom time for practising for the CET. The classroom observations which formed part of my research were carried out in November and December before a CET examination, so all the classes observed were divided into two parts: textbook-based teaching and simulated CET exercises. The pattern was different at the beginning of the semester when there was no CET imminent. The preparation for the CET focuses on getting students used to the format, sequence and types of exercises, and also getting them used to the time pressure for each part of the test. During the period immediately prior to the CET, it seems that textbook-based learning was ignored to some extent and gave way to the CET, thus, the value of the specially-designed textbook could not be realised. There was not even any time left for extra immersion in the latest information on English culture or English news or for practising spoken English.

Nevertheless, all the teachers and students interviewed were in favour of this time allocation. The Vice Dean reported:

“When I told the first-year students that they would have a trial CET Band 4 examination next week, they were so excited. That was the first time they had tried CET since they started their university study. I think they were anxious to try the well-known CET and also find out whether they were competent enough to pass the test.”

(Vice Dean YY, interview)

Other teachers also agreed that students very much liked to do CET exercises during classroom hours and they attached more importance to these exercises than to what they did normally.

One student evaluated the classroom CET hours:

“It is very good that we study and practise CET exercises during classes. I prefer this instead of textbook learning. At least I will get used to the sequence of CET. I know where I will hear the questions and where I am allowed some more time.”

(Student 2, interview)

Another student added:

“I listened much more carefully when it was time for CET exercises. I usually did not care much about the textbook study.”

(Student 1, interview)

Some other students explained:

“There are so many things to learn in the textbook, whilst it is much simpler to do CET exercises, such as listening exercises, writing tasks, and so on. As regards texts, we just go through the texts and try to remember vocabulary.”

(Student 15, interview)

“Of course we will give up the textbook for the purpose of the CET. We are sure to pay more attention on the CET. I will recite vocabulary, but not those in textbook because many words will not be in the CET examinations.”

(Student 7, interview)

All these statements strongly supported practice relevant to the CET examinations. The Chief Editor of the textbook also confirmed that the same focus can be seen in other universities, though the timetabling of this may differ:

“In our university (University Z), we do not allocate any classroom hours for the CET during the usual term time, but we arrange about three weeks, after the textbook has been finished, for CET

practice in order to meet the students' requirement."

(Editor HL, interview)

The relationship between the CET and textbooks

Textbooks also have to be relevant to the CET examinations. Some publishers preferred there to be CET vocabulary lists in the textbook. The Chief Editor recalled:

"There have been enquiries ever since the first edition was published in 1999 about the expected CET 4 pass rate if this textbook was used. I would not list any vocabulary as CET 4 words. They were bound to pass the test if they improve their competence. After three terms of this series, we already know that students will pass the test. Now, the Reform of the CET test has been carried out. In fact, the types of exercises have already been covered in the textbook...The textbook was based on the curriculum, at the same time, CET test is also based on the curriculum. Both are subject to the curriculum, aren't they? So the textbook should originate from the curriculum instead of the test."

(Editor HL, interview)

It is true that if students were able to improve their all-round competence, they were sure to pass the CET, but in fact this was unrealistic for the lower level students. Their understanding was simple and straightforward:

"Can I just recite CET 4 word list? Textbooks? No, there are so many words that we do not need at all for CET 4."

(Student 11, interview)

Hence, it was the Chief Editor's intention that students should spend time on the textbooks, which would be much better than just passing the CET 4, but the lower level students gave up the textbook when they found there were too many unfamiliar words. They were 'frightened' by the difficulty and therefore turned to books entitled 'CET 4 Reference'.

In this section, an attempt has been made to explain the relationship between the CET and teaching-learning Listening Comprehension. The Reform aimed to eliminate the undue social influence of the CET by making changes in the CET itself in the sense that students would be encouraged to develop much better all-round ability. Though more

focus has been put on listening than before, the actual implementation was not yet satisfactory because teachers and students in University S were observed to have put much emphasis on developing skills to pass the CET. The research did not study the CET itself to check whether it promotes listening skills and strategies. If it is a good listening exam, then it could be seen as having a positive washback effect.

5.4 Use of Multi-media Facilities and the Internet

Language teaching has been broadened to encompass new technologies (Levy 1990), and educational technologies such as multi-media on the computer and the Internet now allow students to control the pace at which they wish (see section 2.9.4). Chinese universities have invested huge amounts of money into establishing multi-media classrooms and an on-line learning system. 85% of the teachers agreed that the most significant change of the Reform was the increased application of the Internet and the fact that students were required to learn more and more autonomously with computers. This section explores answers to Research Q3, i.e. the use of multi-media facilities and the Internet. Sections 5.4.1 and 5.4.2 discuss the use during classroom hours and outside classrooms respectively. Section 5.4.3 outlines some problems of multi-media facilities and the Internet.

5.4.1 Use of multi-media facilities and the Internet during classroom hours

In 2.9.4, the advantages of computer facilities and the Internet were reviewed (see e.g. Bishop, 1999; Chapelle, 2001; Beatty, 2003). As a result of the Reform, multi-media facilities have become more and more central to English teaching-learning, especially for the Listening Comprehension course. Both hardware and software represented the largest investments from the Government and universities. The Reform has called for more use of these facilities. The Administrator commented on the importance of these facilities:

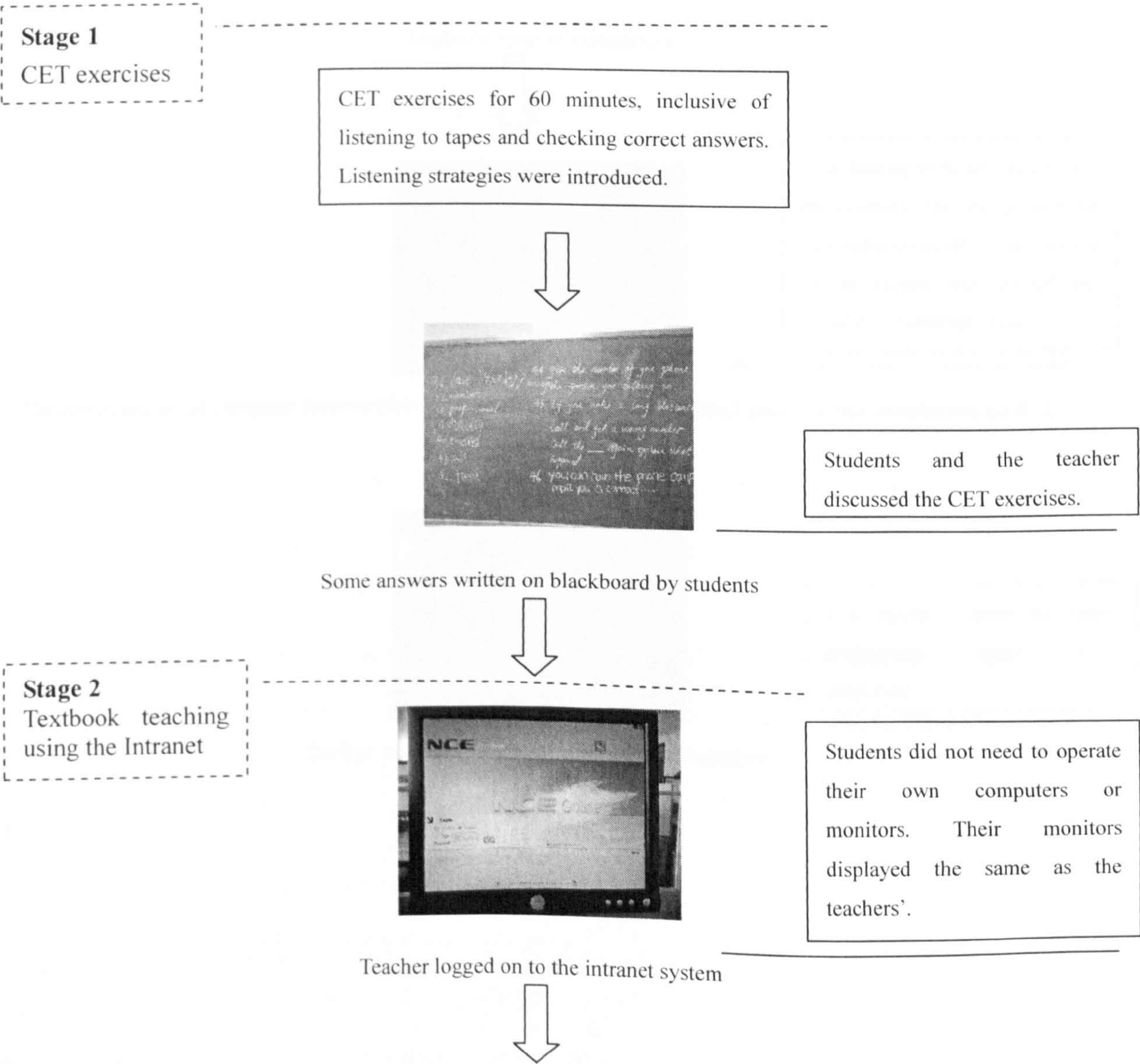
“The Reform was designed to solve the shortage of teachers. It aims to enhance students’

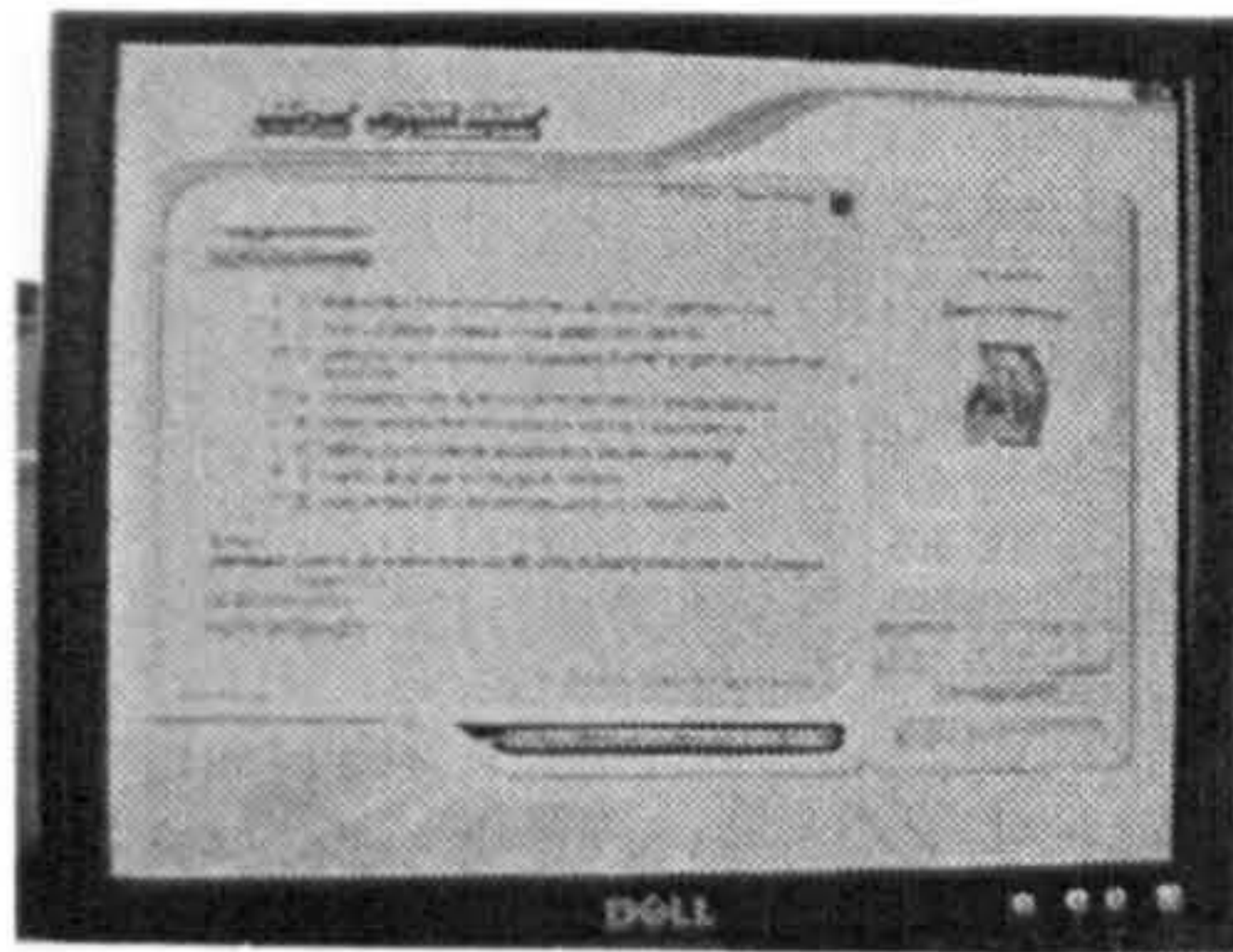
interests in learning.”

(Administrator JY, interview)

The shortage of English teachers in China has been discussed in Chapter 3, and the use of multi-media facilities and the Internet makes it possible for learners to learn without teachers, which means that fewer teachers would be able to teach more students. With regard to students’ interests in learning with computers, this is to be investigated in this section.

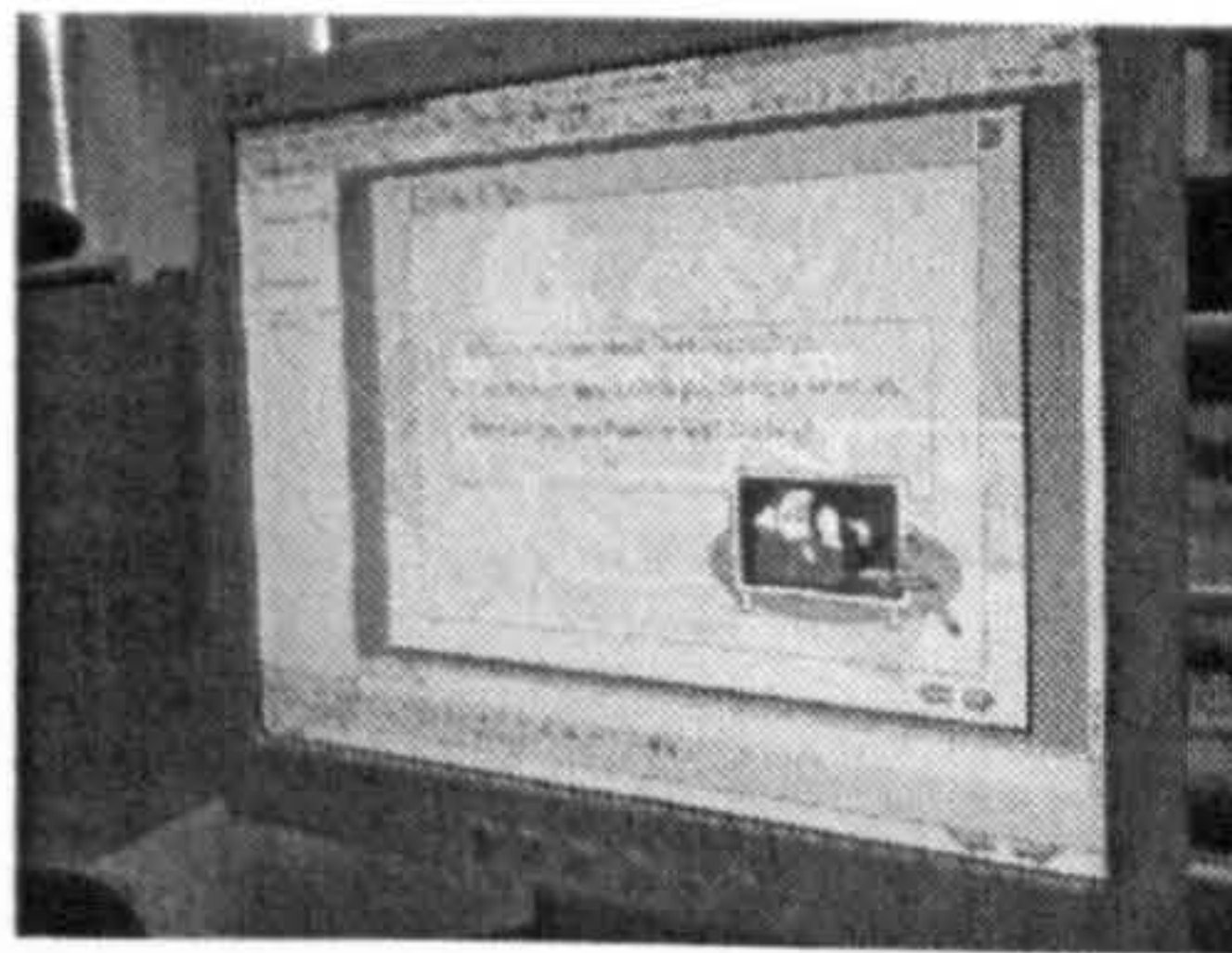
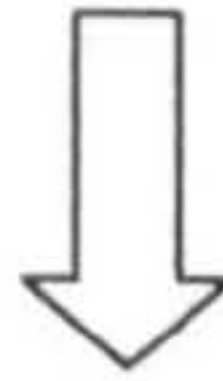
Classroom observations were employed to understand how teachers used multi-media facilities. A detailed timetable of the observations can be found in Appendix VIII. Here is an actual example of classroom teaching for a session of 90 minutes:





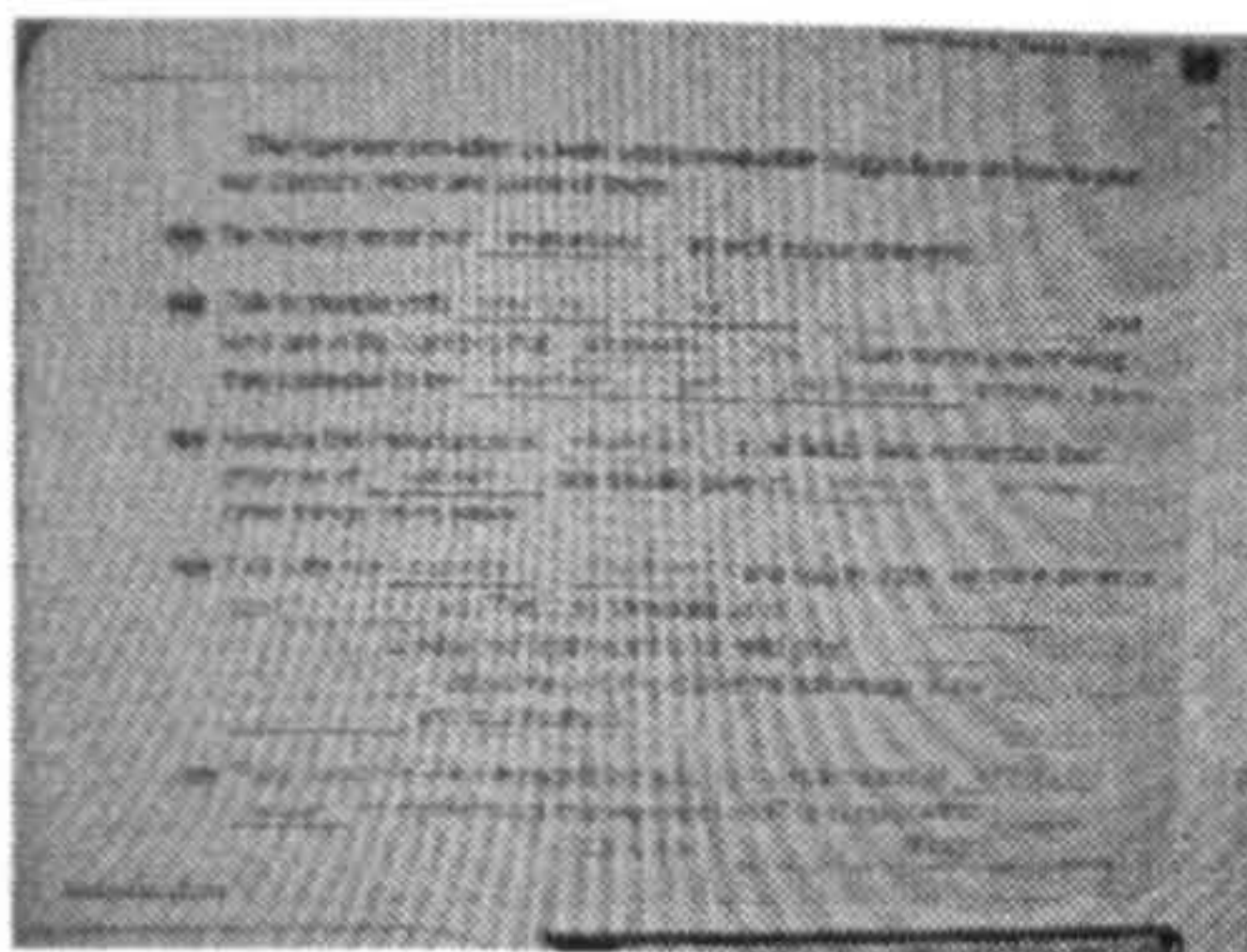
These questions were the same as those in the textbooks. The teacher used the keyboard to enter students' answers.

Pre-listening questions (prediction)



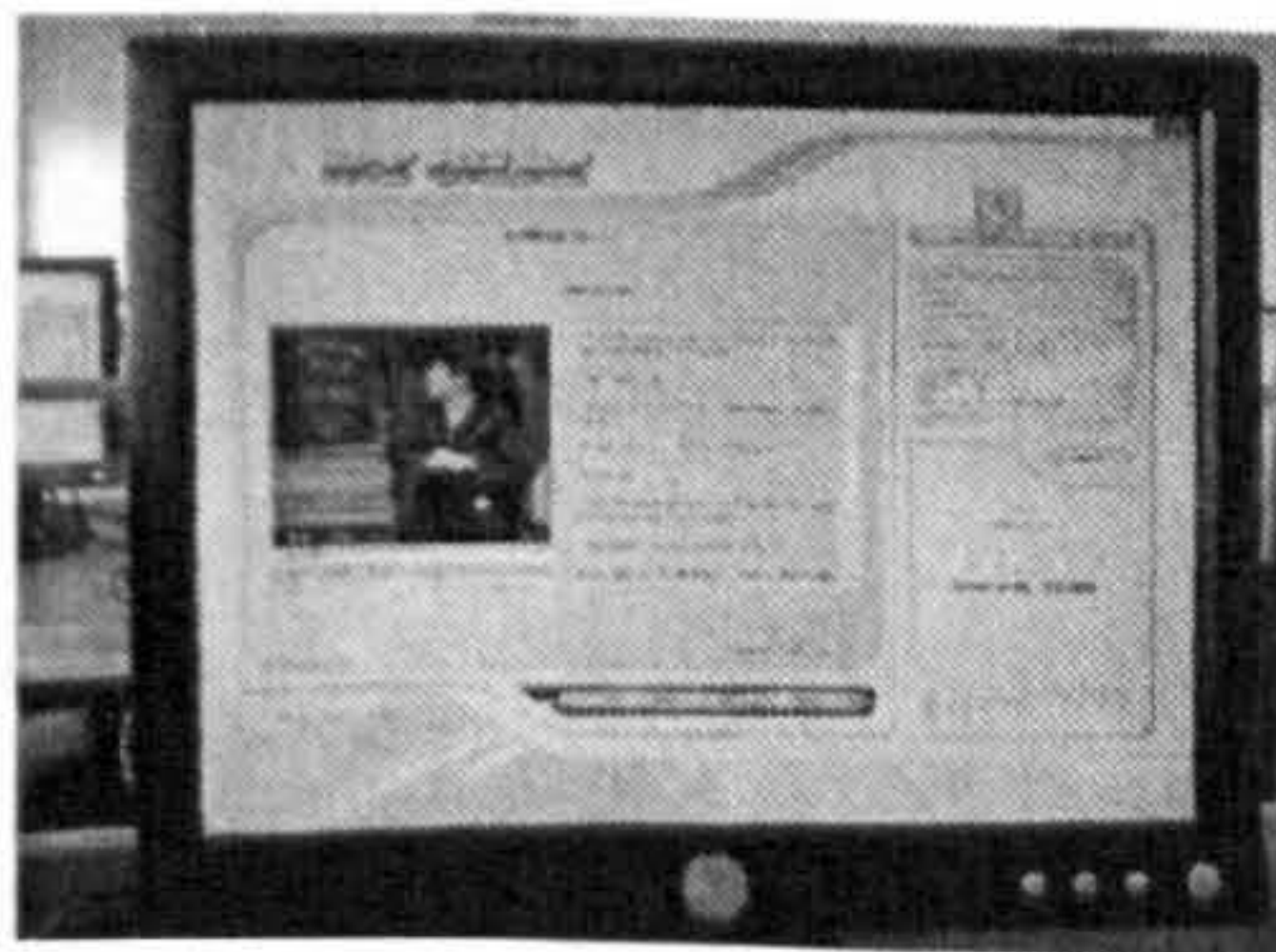
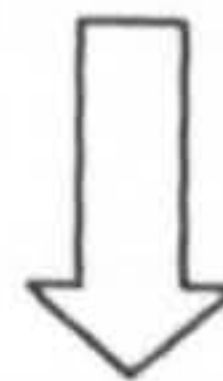
Teachers' notes mainly presented explanations of the texts and introduction of words and expressions.

Teacher's notes in PowerPoint



After listening to the text, students did the exercises. The teacher used the keyboard to enter students' answers and all the answers were checked and scored by the computer system.

On-line exercises on computer monitor (the same as those in textbook, but much easier to correct and more explicit)



The teacher played the video programme again with transcript.

On-line video and transcript of the video programme



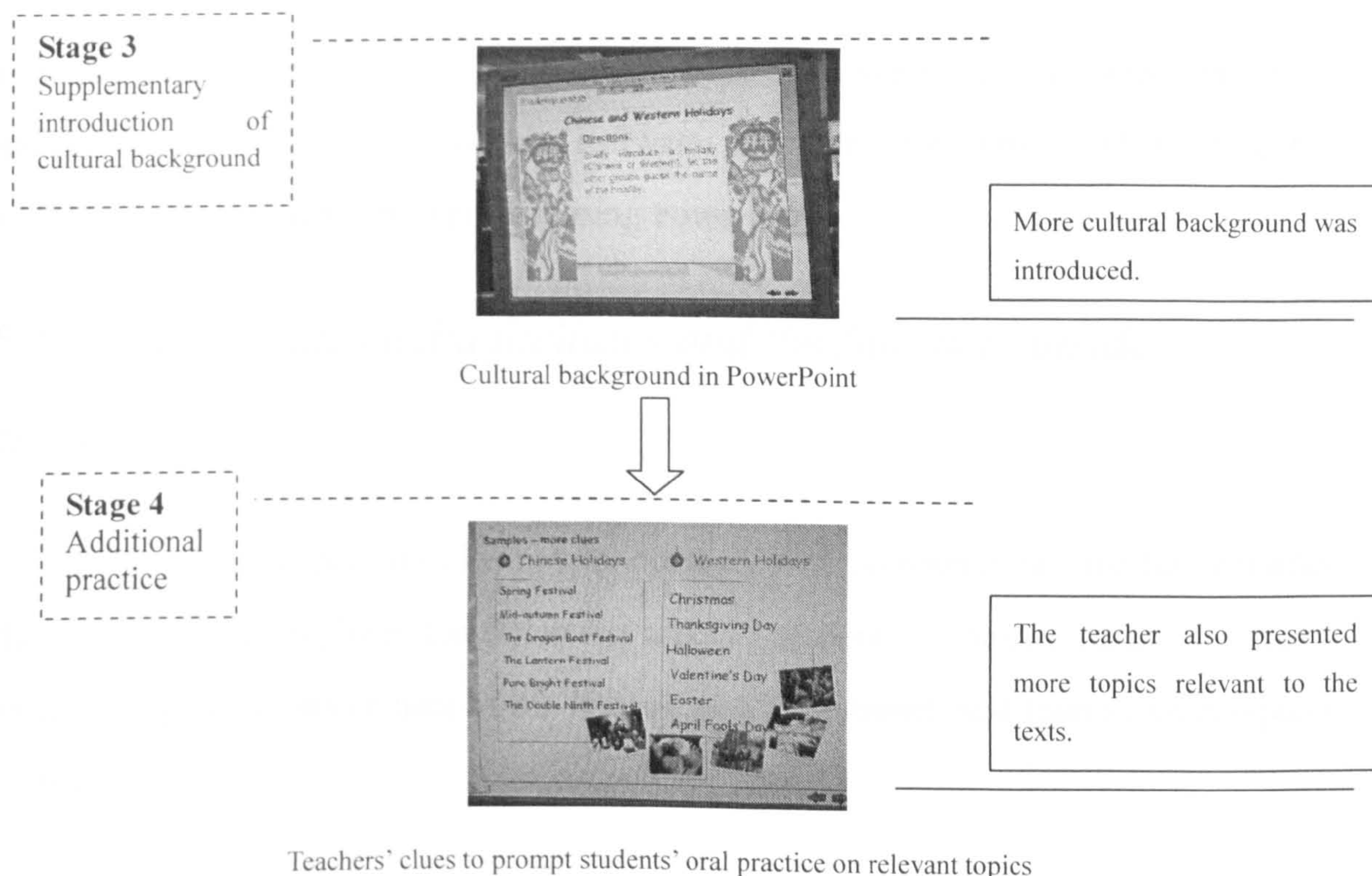


Figure 5.13 An example of multimedia-facilitated Listening Comprehension classroom teaching

The above process was an example of mixed-method teaching using both the old traditional *blackboard-and-chalk* style and modern *computer-and-internet & video-and-audio* style. The video presentation of the text made it very attractive and live, by providing ‘input’ together with a clear transcription on screen. On-screen exercises were ideal for comments on students’ answers. Students reported their exercises and the teacher was able to use the keyboard to insert any words or sentences that students reported. The system could automatically check whether they matched the right answer. The design was interesting because it used cartoon images to evaluate the answer. For example, when the answers were mostly right, it said: “Well done!”, but when there were many mistakes, it showed a cute figure hitting ‘you’ with a hammer and encouraged: “Try again!”

The teaching procedures were different in certain aspects among the teachers observed. For example, one teacher preferred to use the overhead projector and the others only used computers without the projector. Many teachers used headphones when students answered questions; though two teachers and their students, during observation,

preferred to put down their headphones when there was teacher-student interaction. Every teacher observed used the teaching software and computer system. They presented teaching foci and cultural background using PowerPoint.

5.4.2 *Use of multi-media facilities and the Internet outside classrooms*

Students were expected to learn autonomously with computers and the Internet after class. This section explores the following aspects: students’ preferred venues for study, on-line assignment, major uses of the Internet and the intranet, and Interactive computer rooms.

Stuents’ preferred venues for study

As regards the preferred venues for study, the students had their own preferences: some stuck to one location while others took advantage of various locations. The most popular location for those who practised outside the classroom was the dormitory, with a percentage of 44%, and the second choice was computer rooms with a percentage of 40%. Figure 5.14 shows the preferred locations for the small percentage of students who did practise Listening Comprehension outside class.

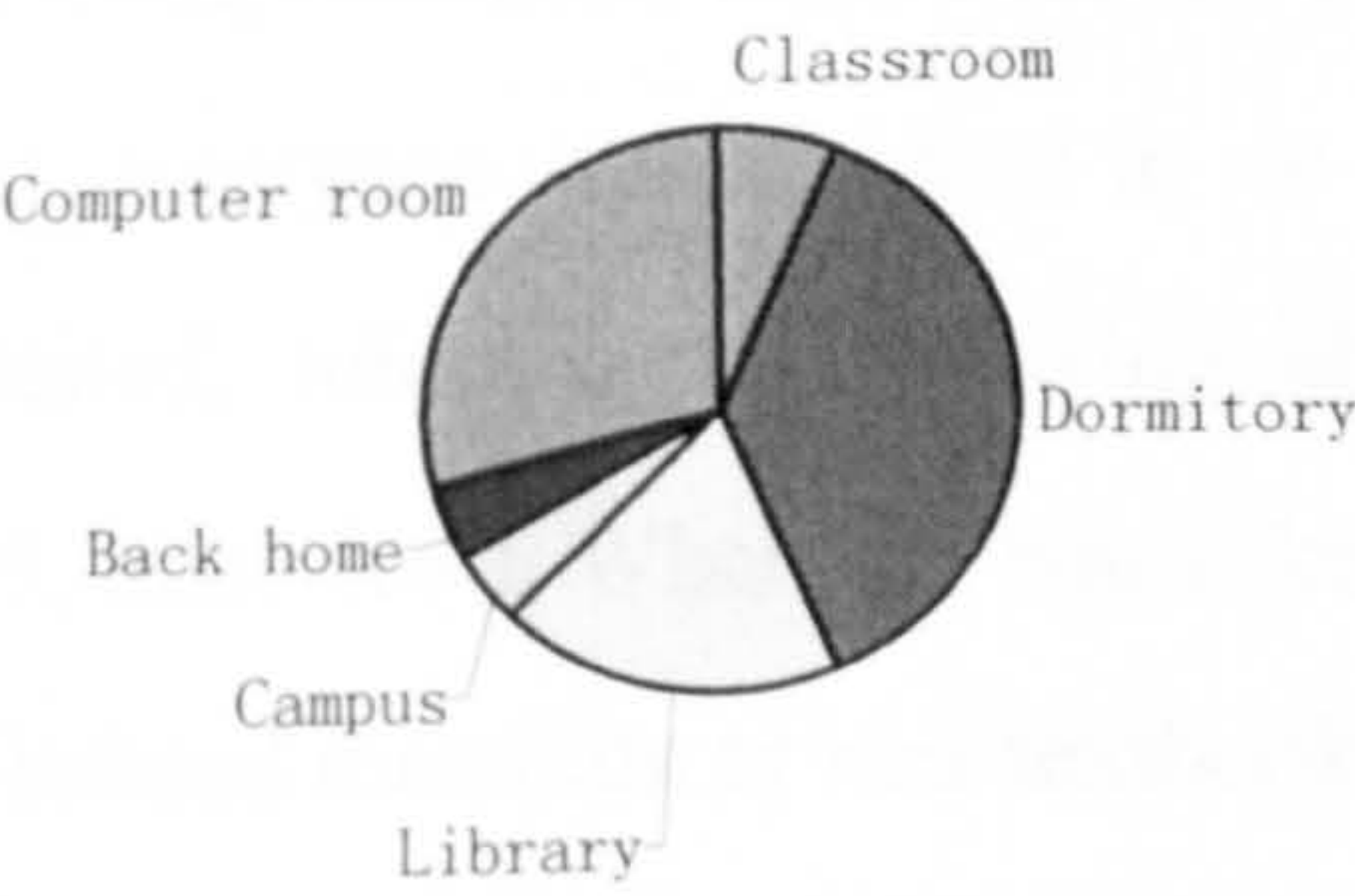


Figure 5.14 Students’ preferred location for practising Listening Comprehension

This indicates that most students did not actually take advantage of the computer facilities provided outside classroom hours, though it was one of the aims of the Reform that students were encouraged to learn and practise English listening via multi-media facilities and the Internet. Reasons for this might be because:

- the facilities were limited; hence, access was not available for each student at any time;
- some students did not know the computer rooms were available;
- some students did not know how to use the facilities in the computer rooms;
- some felt more comfortable studying in the dormitory;
- some students did not study at all after class so there was no need for them to use computers for the purpose of learning.

On-line assignment

English teaching-learning was expected to take place not only in the classroom, but in every possible location after the class. Students were expected to practise listening outside the classroom using CD-ROMs, tapes or mp3 players. Teachers were able to track students' practice on the intranet (CWIS), as well as their quiz scores. There were also frequent announcements and a forum on English learning. As regards preparation assignment before class, one student claimed: "there is no need to prepare before the Listening Comprehension class because the teacher plays the whole content" (Student 3, interview). Everyone was required to do exercises via the intranet after class. Another student stated, referring to reviewing after class, that she "does review after class" (Student 9, interview). When she was asked what she usually did, whether she listened to textbook-related materials or non-textbook-related materials, she said her practice was "to finish the on-line assignment and to listen to CET exercises" (Student 9, interview). Her classmates agreed with her. Thus, the on-line textbook-related materials were all that she reviewed outside the class. The CET exercises could be treated as test-orientated practice.

The Internet was the most important part of the multi-media system. First-year

students had access to campus computers, and from the second year they were permitted to have their own computers in their dorms. However, when asked what they used their computers for, most students admitted that computers and the Internet were mainly used for entertainment such as watching movies (Chinese) and chatting (students' reports can be seen from Figure 5.16), especially when they had their own computers in the dorms. Figure 5.15 shows that, from the teachers' perspective, the students did not actually take advantage of the Internet / the intranet to improve their Listening Comprehension. Most of them only used computers to finish assignments. When asked: "Have you ever tried the CWIS, the on-line system?", one student answered:

"Oh, you mean the on-line assignment. Yes, we finished the on-line assignment."
(Student 3, interview)

Figure 5.15 shows teachers' view on students' use of the Internet / the intranet. That is to say, for the students, CWIS equalled after-class assignments, but nothing else.

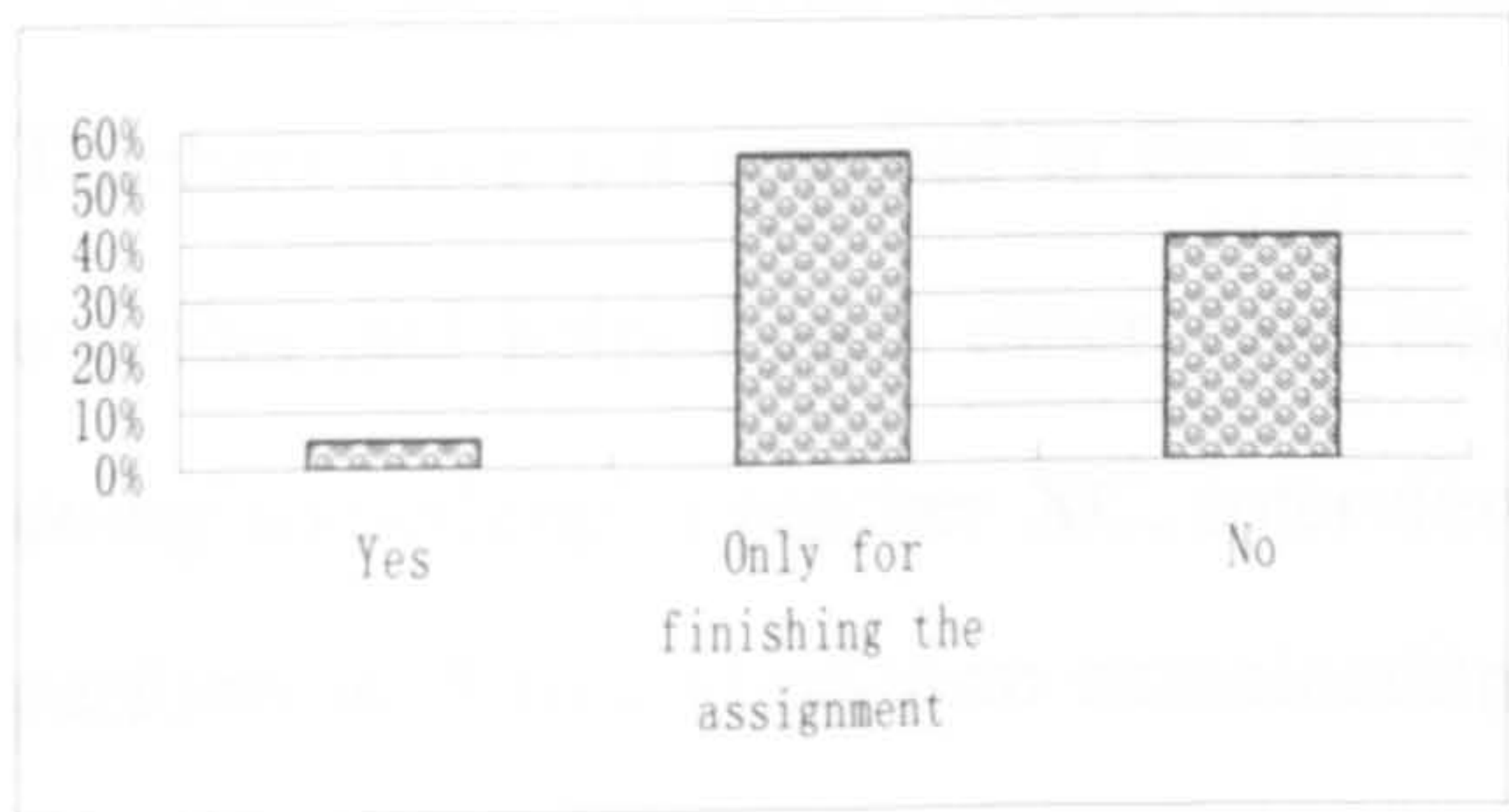


Figure 5.15 Students' use of the Internet / the intranet to improve Listening Comprehension (teachers' viewpoint)

Students were required to pass the on-line assignment for each unit, which was a compulsory task as their scores were recorded and treated as part of the term scores. They could work on the assignment as often as they wanted. If a student failed to pass three units in one term, his / her score on daily performance would be zero. The daily score accounted for 10% to 40% of the total score for the term, as shown in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3 Daily score for Listening Comprehension as percentage of term score

Percentages of scores	Daily score (%)	Mid-term score (%)	End-of-term score (%)	Total term score (%)
Combination 1	10	30	60	100
Combination 2	20	20	60	100
Combination 3	40	0	60	100

There was no strict criterion as regards which combination should be used; instead, it was the teachers who made decisions on how much weight to attach to the online assignment.

Students reported that they tried many times not only to ‘pass’ but also to “obtain a high score”. One female student said:

“Sometimes we tried to do the exercises many times until we got scores of 100 because we all hoped that we could obtain higher scores at the end of term.”

(Student 7, interview)

Some students even ‘helped each other’ in order that they were able to score 100. Teachers were not opposed to the fact that students sometimes finished the assignments together and helped each other. One teacher argued: “It is better that they are, at least, doing something” (Teacher XC, interview). Students were not confident that they would perform well in end-of-term examinations; therefore they hoped the daily scores would compensate.

Major uses of the Internet and the intranet

Students may have their own preferences for how they use the Internet and the intranet. Figure 5.16 shows the major usages of the Internet as reported by students, as compared with teachers’ perceptions.

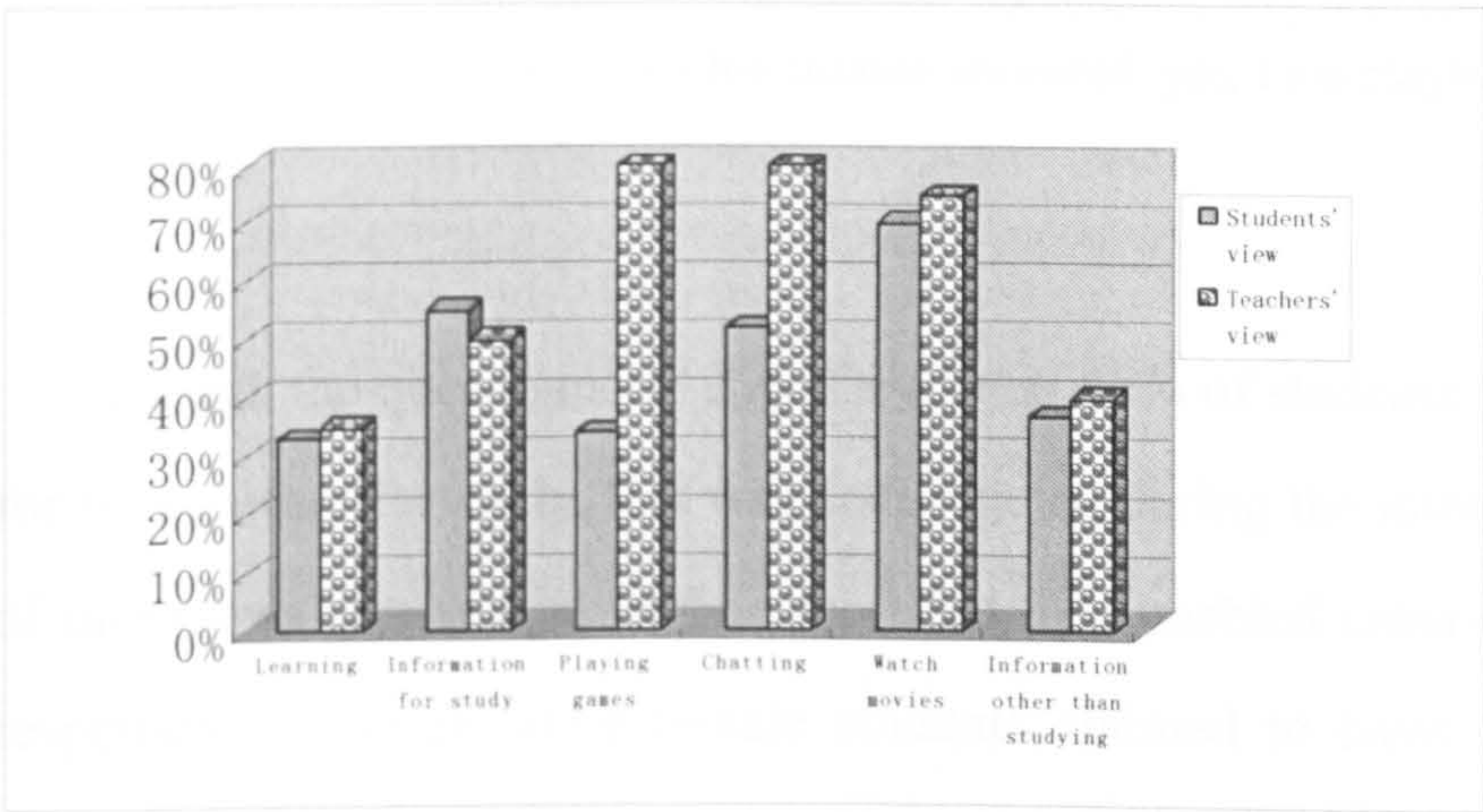


Figure 5.16 Students’ purpose in using the Internet

As this diagram indicates, 70% of students reported that they used the Internet to watch movies (Chinese), 52% to chat, and 34% to play games. This finding confirms the belief of 80% of the teachers surveyed, who had claimed that students mainly played games or chatted via the Internet. However, teachers held dramatically different opinions on this point. One teacher claimed:

“The only use of the computer for students is to play games.”

(Teacher ZY, interview)

She explained that she always used one part of the on-line material for dictation in class. Although the material was available for everybody to access, nobody ever attempted to prepare beforehand. One teacher argued that almost no students would autonomously go on line for the purpose of practising Listening Comprehension if they were not ‘pushed to’. As a matter of fact, the students admitted when interviewed that most of them played games via the Net. The reason they had not confessed to this when completing the questionnaire might be because they understood very well that playing games on the Internet was not expected or even acceptable. One young teacher reported:

“I always chat with students via the Net. Sometimes, they will tell me that somebody is playing games, but I don’t care at all. One student answered: yes, I am playing games, so what? It does not matter.”

(Teacher DQ, interview)

Though the questionnaire data shows that 55% of students used the Internet to search for information for study, this was contradicted during the interviews. Therefore, the role of interviews was crucial in the sense that they enabled cross-checking of questionnaire responses. Although some female students claimed to have occasionally searched for information for their studies, one male student disclosed:

“There was nothing else at all for us boys to use the computer for other than playing games.”

(Student 6, interview)

Another student echoed:

“Teachers have introduced some web sites to practise Listening Comprehension, but I have never tried. Students do not study when there is possibility to use the Internet. It is certain that they are entertained (via the Internet).”

(Student 9, interview)

Interactive computer rooms

Judging by the questionnaires, 56 out of 227 students did not even know there was an interactive computer room available for practising spoken English. The reason was that only students in Level A classes were allocated access hours to use the facilities; consequently, the students in Level B classes did not have the opportunity to use the facilities at all. Many students in Level B complained about the unfair situation:

“They (Level A students) are already better than us, yet, they are still taking advantage of the better computer facilities. I do not mind that there are more facilities available on campus for Level A students because the university is trying to develop them further. But they should not give up on us...”

(Student 12, interview)

“We have paid the same fees, why should we be deprived of the rights to use the facilities?”

(Student 11, interview)

One male Level B student tried to use the facilities by borrowing his Level A friend’s

card. Teachers were therefore asked whether they permitted 'borrowing'. One teacher answered:

"I am not against this kind of abuse because it is unfair that they are not allowed to use the facilities. To be frank, if the hardware equipment permits, I really hope every student has the opportunity to practise."

(Teacher XC, interview)

For Level A students, it was compulsory to 'pass' each unit in the interactive computer room. There were instructions in the room on what students should complete for each unit. The names of those students who had failed to attend three times were listed at the front of the classrooms.

As mentioned in 5.3, those who had used the interactive computer system agreed that it was helpful in improving certain aspects of listening and speaking competence. Of those who had used the interactive computer rooms, more than half used the facilities frequently. Data from students' questionnaire shows that more than 40% were satisfied, though 18% were still disappointed because the practice was unrealistic. The most available format was just 'voice guide', or imitation. The Administrator argued:

"I agree that Listening Comprehension can be improved using computers but I doubt their efficiency of improving speaking skills. The National Education Committee set an excellent goal to reach, but there is still long way to go. Imitation is just a superficial stunt, which does not serve the aim to improve real meaningful communication. It seems that they are practising, but If we are talking about the Reform, it was originally based on very good intention. But the substantial effect, ... it really depends ..."

(Administrator JY, interview)

During the main research phase, teachers' and students' activities were also observed in the interactive classrooms. The teachers spent two afternoons monitoring those classrooms. They arrived well ahead of schedule in order to prepare. Some students were familiar with the system and spoke English loudly and naturally. Other students were not disturbed because everyone used headphones. Some students asked for help from teachers on how to access the interactive materials. However, for a few minutes the system froze and new arrivals could not log in at all. A technician was called to solve the problem.

The interactive computer rooms were designed for students to practise spoken English, but not all of those who had used the interactive computer rooms were satisfied with the software because of some deficiencies in design.

5.4.3 Some problems of multi-media facilities and the Internet

Multi-media facilities were seen as attractive and supportive to a certain extent, but some problems had also occurred. These related to classroom layout, learning materials and software design.

Problems of classroom layout

Many multi-media classrooms were developed after the introduction of the Reform; therefore, most facilities were advanced and up to date. However, there were still problems owing to the physical layout of the classrooms. The technician disclosed:

“There are always students sleeping in multi-media computer rooms during class hours. Some others read novels and some others play their own DVDs or even CD-ROM games.”

(The technician, interview)

One male student admitted:

“Ah ... yes. Some boys play games or DVDs in the computer rooms and girls read novels. mp3 recorders are also available for entertainment, otherwise, if there is really nothing to do, one may choose to have a nap.”

(Student 13, interview)

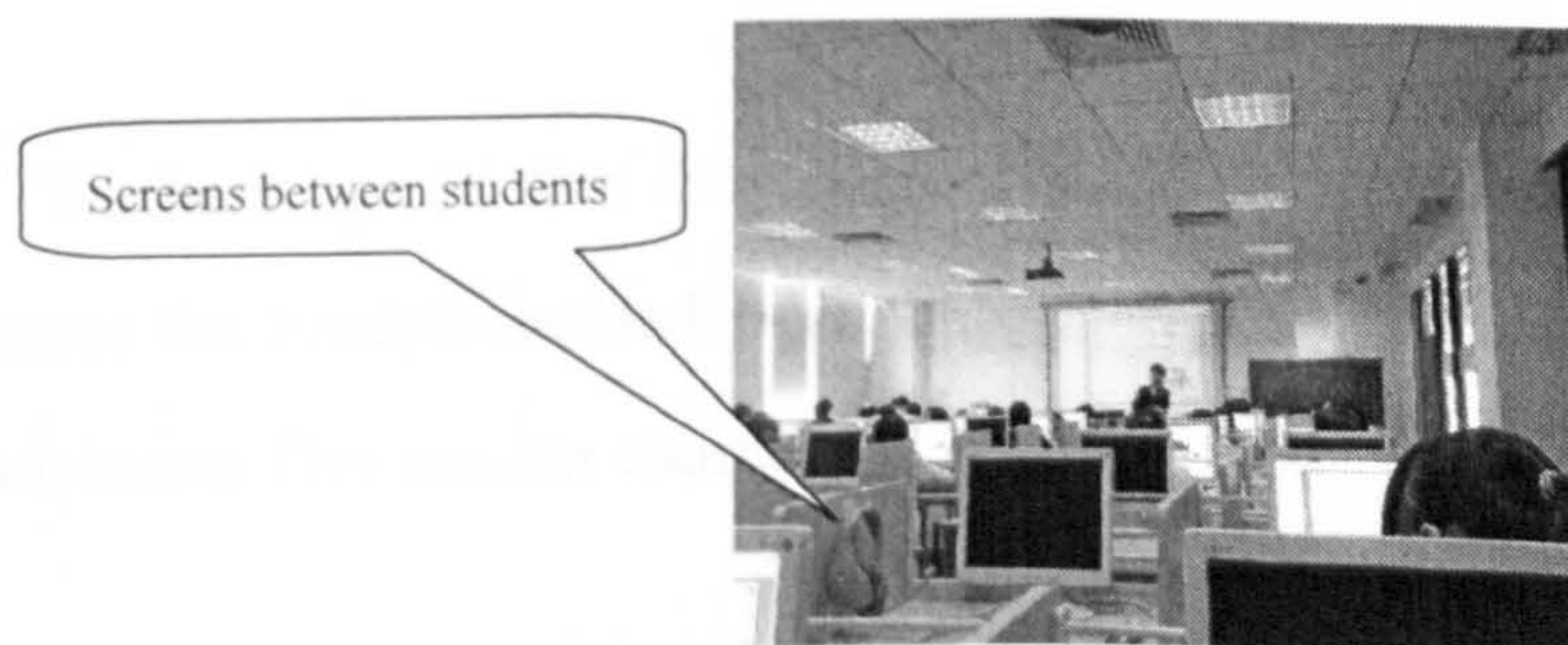
During the classroom observation, my location was always in the back row, and it was not uncommon to see students taking a rest, or rather sleeping, at their desks. No one watched DVDs or played games, though this might be because they were aware of the presence of an observer. It was very difficult to detect whether some students were listening to mp3s or reading books other than Listening Comprehension course books.

There was even an incident which was observed by chance during an interview with students outside a computer room, when some students quit the class ahead of schedule. One student admitted:

“It is not the most serious case, sometimes even more students quit without proper reasons or without notifying teachers.”

(Student 4, interview)

Researchers have already referred to the problems in computer rooms (see 2.9.4 and 3.3.2). In this research, the layout of the multi-media classrooms may also be one of the main causes of the lack of teachers' individual supervision or control over the whole class. There were two types of separation between carrels as shown in Clip 5.3 and Clip 5.4, below. In one type of classroom, the screen (see Clip 5.3) between individual carrels served as a separating space but also hindered the teachers' view. In addition, teachers had to use headphones throughout the class whether they were playing texts or communicating with students, thus, they always stayed at the front desk instead of standing in the middle of the classroom or walking around.



Clip 5.3 Position of screens and computer monitors in a multi-media classroom

Some students described the situation as follows:

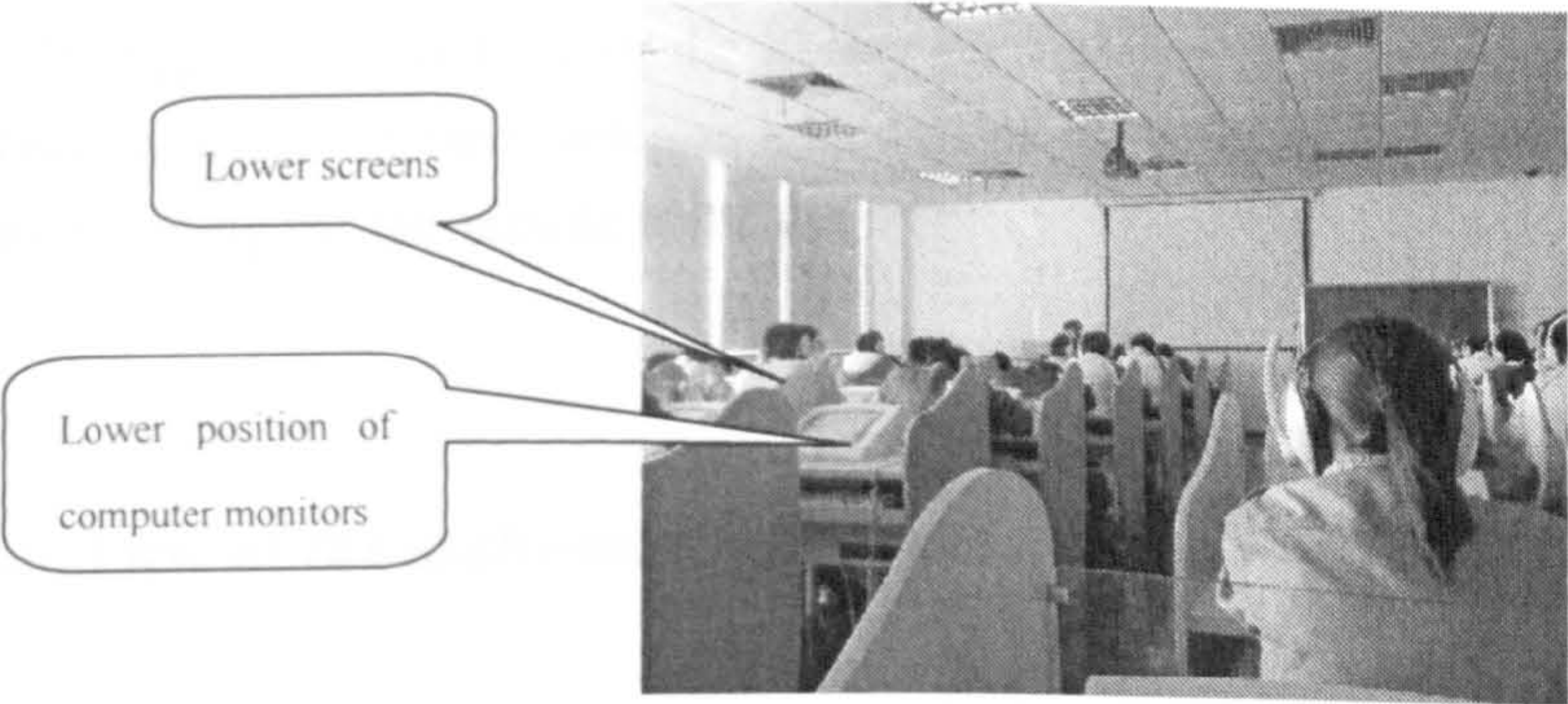
“Previously, there were no multi-media facilities, so we had Listening Comprehension courses in normal (chalk and blackboard) classrooms. Teachers played a tape recorder, but the audio effect was not very good, but teachers controlled the whole progress very well. Once, a student rested at the desk, s/he was reminded immediately. Now, it is very rare for the teachers to stand up,

therefore, they rarely observe what the students are doing.”
(Student 3, interview)

“Our teacher does not care what we are doing, especially when we sit in back rows.”
(Student 15, interview)

“It makes me much more inclined to fall asleep with headphones because I am not disturbed by any other noises.”
(Student 4, interview)

The other style of classroom, with lower screens between students and lower positioning of computer monitors, enables teachers to have a much better visual field.



Clip 5.4: Lower position of screens and computer monitors in a multi-media classroom

Teachers agreed that they seldom stood in the classroom during the class hours because the headphone leads were short and it was troublesome to take off and put on headphones. One teacher claimed:

“The screens do impede our observation of the students’ participation of the classroom learning process.”
(Teacher ZY, interview)

Another teacher suggested that mobile wireless micro-phones and ear-phones might be helpful when teachers were checking progress in the whole classroom. This suggestion found some support:

“Oh, yes. Mobile wireless micro-phones and ear-phones will be very helpful. At least I can use

body language, making the teaching much more active and alive. I do not want to be a robot staying at the front of the room.”

(Teacher JL, interview)

During the observation, one more problem was discovered. The multi-media classrooms and interactive computer rooms were on Floors 7-9, so students usually took the lift to go to the computer rooms. But two lifts could not hold hundreds of students so they were always overloaded during the break time. This was not safe. Students were encouraged to walk up to Floors 7-9, but since many still chose to crowd outside the lift during break time waiting to go upstairs or downstairs, this arrangement was also very inconvenient. One teacher suggested:

“It might be better to have the library on a higher floor because students do not all go to the library at the same time, whereas hundreds of students need to take the lift to go to the computer rooms during the ten-minute break time.”

(Teacher DQ, interview)

Rational use of the multi-media facilities

Another problem for teachers was how to make effective use of multi-media facilities. Multi-media facilities made teaching and learning more flexible and interesting, and perhaps also more efficient. However, it could be problematic if these facilities were over-used. For example, PowerPoint slides may aid teaching and learning, but students might just have enjoyed the colourful show instead of learning actively. One teacher recalled:

“Once, I failed to play the prepared show because something was wrong with the facility. I suddenly found that students were listening very carefully and writing notes. Sometimes, they asked me to slow down because they needed to write down what I said. I was surprised because they usually sat back and looked at the monitors without making notes. I could feel the attention they have paid to what they were listening to.”

(Vice Dean YY, interview)

This captures some of the tension felt by teachers. Audio and video practice should be useful and not merely entertaining; PowerPoint shows should provide an organisational

framework for what is done rather than simply a transcript of what the teacher says.

These criticisms relate to the setting and the facilities. While it might be a perfect solution to have smaller rooms with far fewer students so that teachers could consider the requirements of each student, this would be contradictory to the original aim of the Reform because the application of those facilities was supposed to solve the shortage of teachers and make it possible for fewer teachers to support more students.

Problems of the computer system and software

Teachers also mentioned their anxiety about the unreliability of the multi-media system. Various factors may cause break-downs. For example, the network might break down; or the intranet freezes because of the server; or the computer systems may not run properly because of a classroom flaw. The Administrator expressed her uncertainty about relying solely on the computer system because of the risk that it might break down. She said:

“It is quite different from the teachers’ presence. It is also quite different from the paper-based materials. The hard copies of materials are there, right at hand once printed, but the materials on the Net...It is also possible that a few of the computers break down in the classroom.. How about 5 out of 45 computer-rooms become out of order? You lose control immediately. So, ... there are problems.”

(Administrator JY, interview)

Therefore, some teachers still preferred to adopt the ‘old fashioned’ blackboard / whiteboard and book teaching style.

With regard to self-motivated practice after class, another factor had influenced students’ active practice. One student complained:

“I think it is useless to practise listening by ourselves. I do not feel that I am improving just by listening and listening. There is no transcription for us, thus, I will never understand the words or sentences that I do not understand at the beginning. It is useless to listen for ten times or even more. It makes no difference. If the transcription is available, I can at least check..”

(Student 8, interview)

The system included an on-line dictionary for students to use during listening practice, but the vocabulary was limited to words used in the texts and the indexing system was not very practical. For example, if a student heard a word beginning with 'm', she had to go to the 'm' list and scroll down to find a word close to the one she had heard. Another student recalled:

"I tried using a website to practise Listening Comprehension, but when there were some words I could not understand, there was no teacher to help. Therefore, I eventually became very annoyed and frustrated."

(Student 5, interview)

The Vice Dean acknowledged these defects in the multi-media learning material: "They are partly right on this aspect" (Vice Dean YY, interview). Transcriptions existed but students did not know this since they were only available when students had finished all the exercises and obtained a score above criterion level. This design did not work well with low-proficiency students, who soon lost interest and stopped doing any practice at all. There were also students who finished the entire task well ahead of schedule. One teacher compared these non-English majors with English majors:

"Some English majors took only two weeks to finish a twenty-week on-line-assignment. This should be encouraged."

(Teacher XC, interview)

The data indicates that multi-media facilities and the Internet were being widely used on the university campus, but there were still many students who did not have equal opportunities to use the facilities due to the limited number of computers. At the same time, the available facilities had not yet been made full use of as expected by the Reform. Problems occurred because of the classroom layout, which hindered the teachers' observation during classroom time. There were also defects in the computer system, software and on-line learning materials.

5.5 Obstacles to the Implementation

In this section, the focus is first on an overall view of the Reform comparing the actual implementation and the planned objectives, followed by an overview of detailed obstacles to the implementation. All these obstacles are described as the answer to Research Q4.

The Government and universities invested a considerable amount in facilities and software for the purpose of enhancing students' competence in listening and speaking. It was expected that by taking advantage of these facilities students would be able to learn autonomously and enhance their all-round abilities with increased practice of English listening and speaking. However, judging by previous studies (see Chapter 2 and Chapter 3), as well as the results of this research, the implementation was rather slow in the sense that students were still sticking to their previous study focus. They might spend more time on practice, but many students still practised for the sole purpose of passing the CET examinations.

One approach to evaluating the success of the implementation would be to compare two modes of College English teaching-learning: one was the mode suggested by the Reform and the other was the actual mode that emerged during the research. The structure of English teaching-learning suggested in the Curriculum Reform is shown as follows:

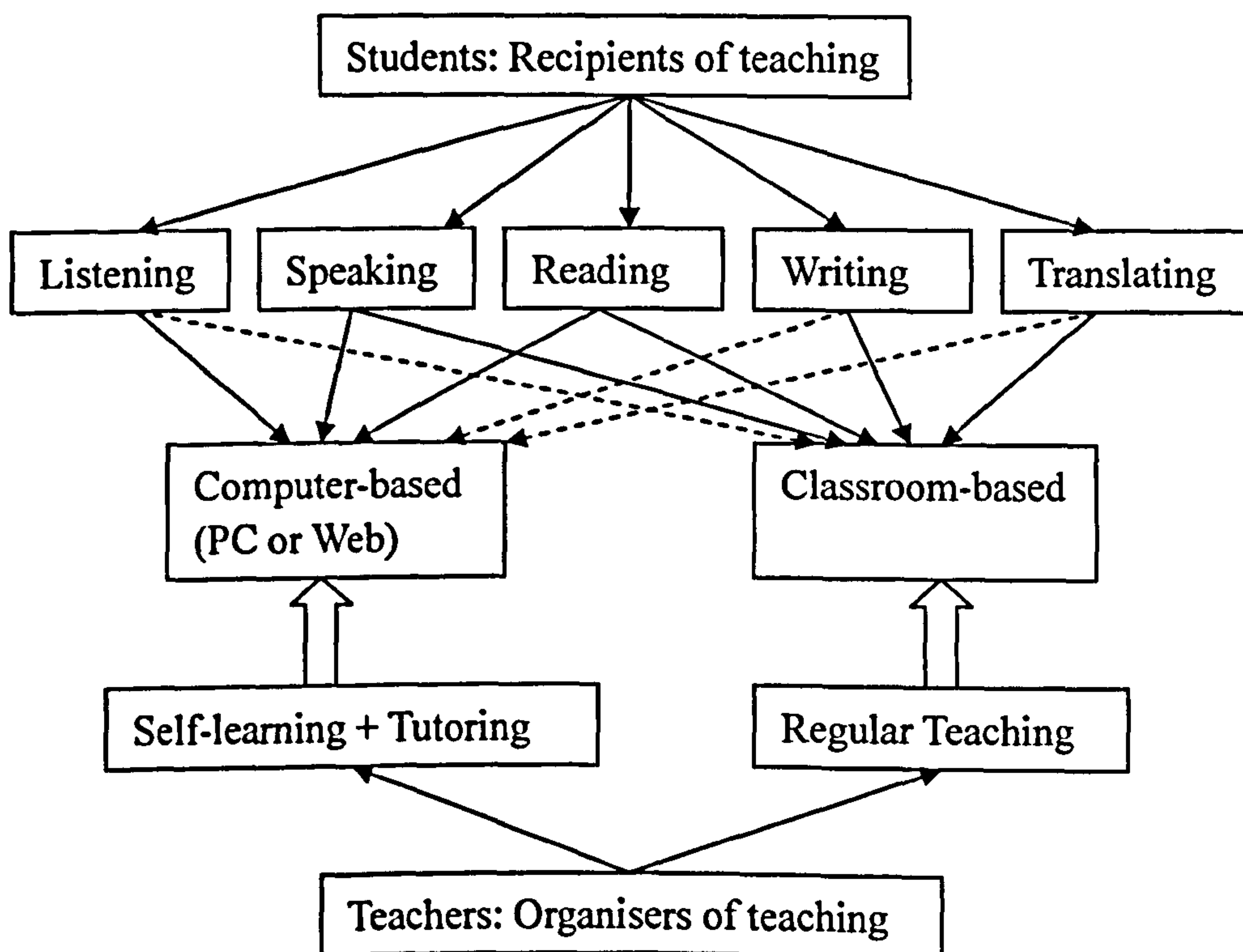


Figure 5.17: Computer- and Classroom-based College English Teaching Mode (Adapted from College English Curriculum Requirements.)

The above figure shows that teaching activities such as practice in English listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation could be conducted via either the computer or classroom teaching. The solid arrow indicates the intended main environment for learning, and the dotted arrow indicates the supplementary environment for learning. Listening specifically was to be practised mainly in a computer- and Web-based environment, supplemented by classroom teaching; writing and translation were to be developed mainly in the classroom, supplemented by a computer- and Web-based environment; speaking and reading, on the other hand, were to be practised by both means. In the process of teaching, teachers would serve as organisers of teaching activities, and teaching administration would be implemented by the administrative office of teaching affairs, teachers, and teaching management software.

In reality, data from classroom observation and interviews showed a different picture, as indicated in Figure 5.18:

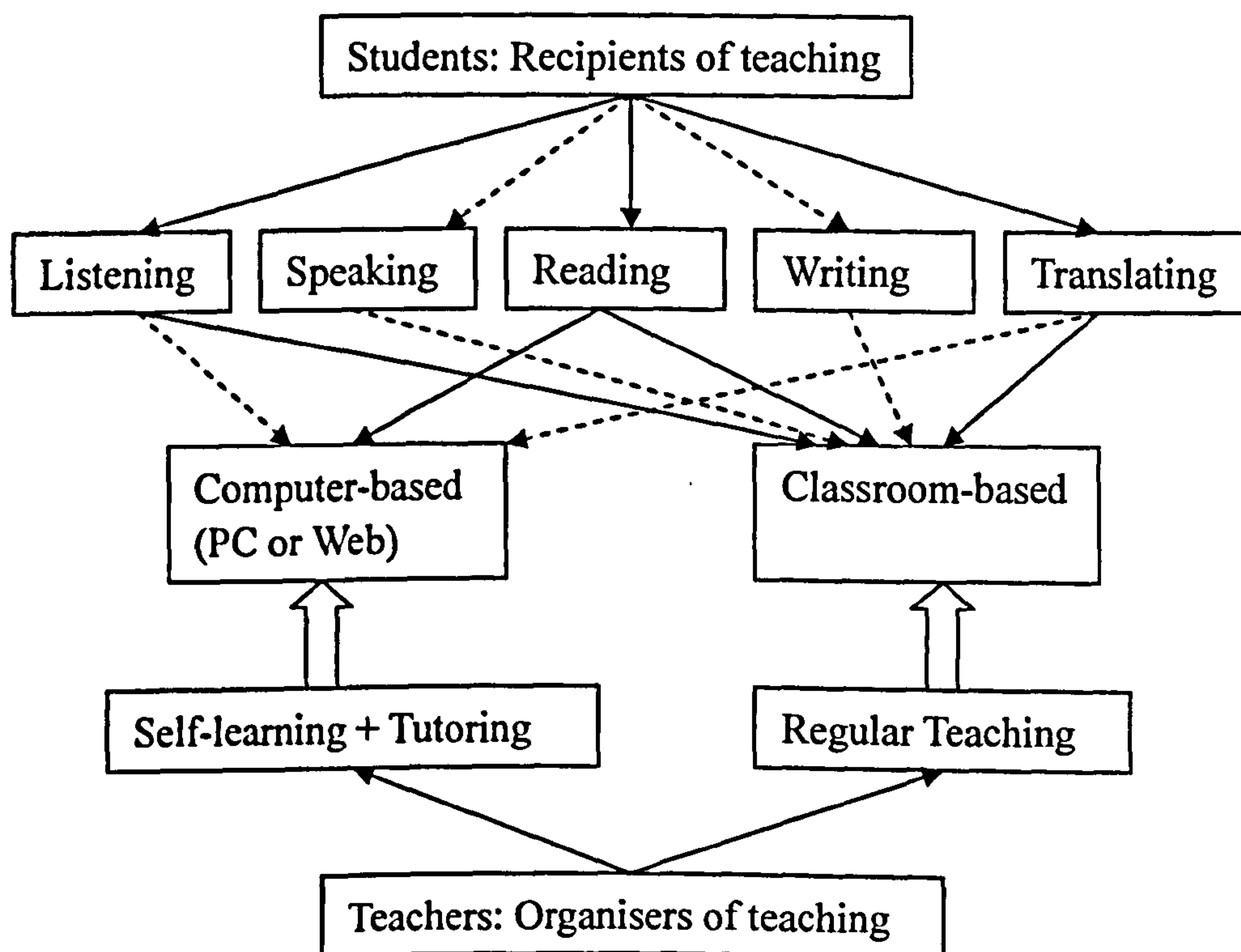


Figure 5.18: English Teaching Mode observed in University S

Figure 5.18 shows that listening and translating were practised mainly in the classroom, supplemented by computer- and Web-based environment; speaking and writing was practised only in the classroom, without further practice outside the classroom; only reading was practised by both means. Thus, students only practised listening, reading and translating both in class and by computer- or Web-based environment and only Reading and Translation were practised according to the requirements of the Reform. This was especially inappropriate for teaching and learning listening. As recommended in the College English Curriculum Requirements, listening ability should be developed mainly in a computer- or Web-based environment, supplemented by classroom teaching, but in reality the implementation was the other way round; students learned and practised listening mainly in class, and seldom practised in a computer- or Web-based environment. That is to say, students did not take advantage of

the huge amount of practice materials at all and it was very difficult to improve their ability within the limited hours in class.

The failure to fully realise the Computer- and Classroom-based College English Teaching Mode were various. The obstacles to the implementation were of various kinds:

- The Reform authorised the universities to set their own teaching requirements according to their own status such as the English level of students, the quantity of advanced facilities, and the number of experienced teachers. It allowed institutions to proceed at a different pace in implementing the Reform. However, the government authorities did not offer any substitute or supplementary measures, such as some public computer facilities that could be shared by several universities.
- The lack of experienced teachers has also hindered the effective implementation of the Reform. Among the available teachers, training courses have been run and some impact has been found in technology using, but there were either little follow-up measures taken to ensure teachers' self-improvement after the first round of training, or measures to activate teachers' self-improvement. Hence, teachers were not fully equipped to make the kind of role switch that the Reform had expected, especially as regards their role in exploiting the Internet and the intranet. Moreover, some teachers did not bother to actively take on the role expected by the Reform because they might have become too used to their previous roles or they might not be confident of their operation of computers.
- The findings indicate differences between higher level students and lower level students. The learning outcomes varied due to students' English levels. One of the reasons was that students' learning focuses were different due to differences in their English levels. Higher level students had more opportunities to practise Listening Comprehension, which was encouraged by the Reform. Lower level students, by contrast, mostly focused on test-orientated practice. They simply aimed to pass the CET for the purpose of graduation and better jobs; therefore, they were not motivated to practise English listening or speaking which they saw as too demanding for them. For the latter, then, the objective of all-round competence development has not yet

been realised because of the limited improvement in listening and speaking competence.

- Access to multi-media facilities was not guaranteed for every student on the ground that these were insufficient to meet student demand. In reality, however, the available multi-media facilities were not fully used. Moreover, many students in the research used computers and the Internet for entertainment rather than for practising English.
- As regards teachers' use of multi-media facilities and the Internet, many of them were still not familiar with the facilities; therefore, they were not able to make full use of them or provide instructions to students.
- There were also deficiencies of software design. Flaws in operation or application caused some loss of interest or trust in learning via the network. For example, students only had access to the transcription of the texts if they completed the test successfully; therefore, it was difficult for those lower level students to access for reference. The interactive system sometimes mis-scored undistinguishable sounds because of in-built high-level criteria and students were then misled.
- Textbook packages recommended by the Reform were criticised because of the topics and levels of difficulty.
- In addition, the classroom layout was also found during observation to be one of the problems. For example, the screen between students in the multi-media room hindered teachers' overall control because teachers could not see what their students were doing behind the screen; at the same time, the headphones prevented teachers from walking nearer to students. This was a potential problem because students might be tempted to watch leisure programmes such as video films. Even the floor plan of the multi-media classrooms affected students' learning choices. The higher location of the classrooms not only affected the on-time classes but also influenced their decisions on the venue for learning.

Amongst these obstacles, teachers and students were the most significant factors because their performance determined whether the Reform was successful or not. It was found that some of the obstacles had already been anticipated such as the different

teaching and learning background of students and universities, and insufficient computer facilities; though some could have been anticipated earlier such as the deficient design of the textbook packages. There were also some obstacles which occurred unexpectedly such as the classroom layout and some flaws in software.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has assessed the extent to which the Reform of National English Teaching at college level in China has been implemented in one Chinese university. The national authorities were aware that there were different levels of universities and different levels of students, thus, they set down flexible curriculum requirements, as mentioned in Chapter 1: the teaching of College English should follow the principle of providing differentiated guidance for different groups of students and instructing them in accordance with their aptitude so as to meet the specific needs of individualised teaching. Therefore, universities were empowered to make amendments to gradually realise the aim of developing students' competence.

One of the research focuses was on the application of multi-media facilities for the purpose of enhancing students' autonomous learning and improving their ability in Listening Comprehension. Based on Morris's (1996) curriculum model of the components of a curriculum, which was discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, this research covered those closely interrelated elements such as teaching intentions, the content of what is taught, the method of teaching-learning, and assessment of a curriculum. The Curriculum Requirements were intended to establish new teaching purposes or teaching intentions, and textbooks, teaching facilities and teaching methods were designed to suit these. This research has identified eight aspects with regard to the implementation of the Reform:

- 1) University authorities' efforts
- 2) Different teaching requirements for different levels of students' English proficiency
- 3) Competence in English Listening Comprehension
- 4) English Listening Comprehension textbooks
- 5) Teachers' role

- 6) Autonomous learning
- 7) Multi-media facilities, the Internet, and the intranet
- 8) CET in the Reform

The following part will discuss all these aspects.

1) University authorities' efforts

The University authorities have made certain efforts to ensure the implementation of the Reform. They have invested in facilities and in training teachers; they grouped students as Level A and Level B, according to their English proficiency levels and adjusted the teaching plans for students of different levels. They have selected the most suitable textbooks, and trained teachers to use multi-media facilities and the Internet. They have also strengthened supervision of the application of computer facilities. However, some problems were found. Firstly, the computer facilities for self-access were still insufficient; therefore, only Level A students were allowed to use computer rooms after class. Secondly, the authorities added two classroom hours for Level B students as a compensation, which seemed to be contrary to the intention of using self-access facilities and encouraging autonomous learning. Thirdly, teacher training was insufficient to guarantee the effective use of computer facilities.

2) Different teaching requirements for different levels of students' English proficiency

Guideline 2 of the Reform suggests that the curriculum should be flexible and open: we need to set different requirements for different universities. Due to students' different English proficiency levels and the limited facilities, they were grouped as Level A and Level B in university S with different English teaching requirements (see 4.5.1) and inequitable access to facilities, which meant that their learning outcomes would be different. With regard to the students, there was tremendous diversity. Students were admitted with different scores for different majors, thus, their starting points were very

different when entering the University. Some students paid much more attention to English learning and practising than others. Some students spent most of their time on their majors and neglected English learning because they expected to rely on their majors in their future career instead of their English ability. Some students were interested in learning English (or another language) for specific reasons such as playing games or watching movies. Some students were enthusiastic and self-motivated while they were still fresh at university, but their diligence gradually waned after they started their second year. Hence, teachers were required to instruct students and support their learning at different levels and different stages.

One suggested solution made during the interviews was to allocate specific times for the use of the facilities. The University authorities also planned to adjust the teaching plan for Level B students so that these students would have more opportunities to use all the facilities.

3) Competence in English Listening Comprehension

English Listening Comprehension is one of the most important competences that the Reform aims to enhance. The percentage of marks allocated to Listening Comprehension in the CET was raised in the hope that this would stimulate a shift in the emphasis of teaching and learning. However, students, and also some teachers, still attached more importance to grammar and reading. Many students practised Listening Comprehension only for the purpose of passing the CET. They were not at all interested in enhancing their competence more generally because they were not confident at all in their levels of English proficiency. It seemed much more realistic to pass the CET and prepare for career interviews.

With regard to practising Listening Comprehension, students preferred a more relaxed approach, such as watching English movies or listening to English songs, whilst teachers supported listening to English news and interactive practice with computers. English movies were thought to be helpful for students of high level of English knowledge and with supporting information such as background introduction. Students also expressed a

wish to have native English teachers. However, on the one hand, the teaching skill of such teachers was questioned; and on the other hand, the students' ability to communicate with native teachers is questioned.

4) English Listening Comprehension textbook packages

The Listening Comprehension textbook packages were also designed to cater for the new Curriculum Requirements. Because of the interactive nature of the on-line version of the textbook and the electronic reference book, many teachers were willing to make use of the multi-media facilities in class.

The authorities anticipated different requirements of universities and students so they introduced four series of textbooks for universities' trial use. However, the choice of topics in these four series was criticised by teachers in University S. They did not always like to talk about depressing topics on diseases or over-profound business topics. According to the teachers' description, students were also not interested in such topics. Contrary to the expectations of some editors of textbooks, students preferred to listen to and read articles on explorative and natural topics instead of *moral lessons* that 'teach' them how to behave. Close study of the four series of textbook packages revealed problems with the layout, design and appearance. The font, the density, the lack of colour, the illustrations and the arrangement of texts and exercises all influenced the preferences of both teachers and students.

In contrast, in spite of perceptions that some sections of the selected textbook were difficult and others too easy, it seems that, from the questionnaires and interviews, the textbook in University S appeared to be broadly suitable for most students, with excellent topics and an appropriate level of difficulty.

Textbooks are necessary for learning in the sense that they provide source materials and guidance or reference for further practice. Nevertheless, teaching-learning should not be limited to textbooks. Teachers also confirmed it was unnecessary to listen to the texts after class because there were tremendous opportunities for learning via audio and video programmes, the intranet and the Internet.

5) Teachers' role

One of the expectations of the Reform was that the teachers' role would change. It was quite demanding for teachers to not only operate the equipment themselves but to also offer instruction and support to enable students to use the facilities effectively. It was found from the research that, on the whole, younger teachers were more used to using the computers, intranet and the Internet. They introduced interesting websites on which students could practise as well as to have fun; they got in touch with students frequently via the Internet; they uploaded new content onto the intranet, or some other web-based space such as QQ, for all to share and practise. Some older teachers did not use the Internet for learning or entertainment themselves; therefore, their knowledge of these possibilities was quite limited. For them, there was clearly a need for in-service teacher training.

For the purpose of developing students' autonomous learning, teachers were expected to clarify the difference between high school learning and university learning. Teachers could also provide suggestions for what to learn or what facilities to use after class.

Teachers were also supposed to be capable of organising an active class with substantial learning content. It was suggested by one teacher during the interview that more language teachers should go abroad to expand their knowledge so that they would be able to expand their mastery of not only the language per se but also their cultural awareness.

The idea of being taught by native English teachers was welcomed by most students but most teachers interviewed held different opinions because they were worried about the skills of some native teachers. However, students preferred to be '*listeners*' instead of interlocutors. In addition to the fact that they lack confidence in using the language, this might also be because of the influence of the Confucianism and Chinese 'modesty' (see 2.2 and 2.9.2). With this subtle but historical (more than two thousand years old) influence, Chinese people are more likely to remain silent in public to be 'modest' (Morris, 1996). Some students' preference for native teachers seemed to be based just on curiosity.

Native English teachers can be valuable, according to teachers interviewed, if the particular native English teacher is experienced in organising a class and teaching the language effectively; and if students have acquired a high level of English knowledge so that they can understand and make themselves understood.

6) Autonomous learning

Autonomous learning via the Internet or the intranet was another aim of the Reform. Students were expected to learn autonomously after class via the intranet and the Internet, but it seemed that students were not yet ready for this because they were used to being spoon-fed by teachers. At University S, students at different levels held different viewpoints on their English studies and the relationship to their future careers, thus, their autonomy in relation to English learning varied. Based on comments from teachers who had experience in teaching in both higher and lower level universities, it would seem that students in higher level universities or the better students in ordinary universities learned English for their future career; consequently, they set new goals to achieve once entering university. These students were more willing to study and practise English both in the classroom and outside in their daily lives. Comparatively, students of lower ability, especially in English, could not see any connection between their English competence and their future career. Most of them did not think they would have a career for which they would need English; consequently, their purpose in learning English was just to pass the CET. For these students, English learning was really a burden with no associated expectations or any anxiety.

Teachers were encouraged to develop students' ability to learn autonomously but to some extent still felt the need to provide the kind of input they had previously. One suggestion made was to organise '*autonomous study with teachers' instruction*' for students of lower English proficiency so that they might gradually get used to 'genuine autonomous study'. In contrast, higher level students were more self-disciplined in learning and practising. The transition from extremely intensive high school learning to over-relaxed university life that called for self-discipline was also seen as difficult by

teachers and students. Therefore, according to some teachers, there should be a balance between high school test-orientated teaching-learning and university competence-orientated teaching-learning. It was also suggested by some teachers that the university mode could also be promoted in high schools so that the teaching was no longer as test-orientated. If university-level education was not seen as being isolated, this would be the latest stage in a continuous circle. If earlier stages were too different, it would be very difficult to bring about change in later stages.

7) Multi-media facilities, the Internet, and the intranet

One of the aims of the Reform was to solve the shortage of English teachers, so it was recommended that every university should install multi-media facilities, especially the Internet and an intranet because computers and the Internet were thought to complement English teachers. The Reform had influenced daily teaching and learning in University S in that more and more multi-media facilities were available, such as three-dimensional computer-based learning sources, the Internet and the intranet, and the resources being used by teachers. However, the research shows that many students were still not ready for learning autonomously outside classroom time using the multi-media facilities.

Multi-media facilities could make teaching and learning more flexible, more attractive, and more efficient; but they could be problematic. Firstly, teachers were restricted in their movement because of the headphones and microphones, and their sightlines and therefore control of the whole class were also restricted because of the screens and equipment in front of every student; secondly, students might just 'enjoy the show' instead of 'learning while enjoying'; thirdly, it was not necessary for all the students to use the most advanced facilities because some lower level students might use it for playing games or watching DVDs, instead, the basic equipment was sufficient for many students.

In addition to these above-mentioned obstacles to classroom application of multi-media facilities, the problem of applying these facilities after class was serious. Though there were requirements to use the computers and the Internet, most students only used them for finishing on-line assignments; some students only used them for games and

movies.

There were also some deficiencies in the software design. For example, students did not have access to transcriptions of listening materials until they had completed a unit of work successfully; the network was not always stable and many factors caused break-downs, thus, the Net was not reliable enough to make full use of. Moreover, the automatic feedback system was not satisfactory during interactive practice with computers, which resulted in students feeling disappointed.

8) CET in the Reform

With regard to CET, it would be desirable if there is positive washback, i.e. teachers and students are encouraged to do useful things; though the reform of the CET was evaluated as not yet successful because the test-orientated tradition had not yet been broken. The CET was still leading classroom teaching. Teachers spent classroom time introducing testing skills and doing CET exercises, which were welcomed by most students. Some students treated the CET as the exclusive goal of learning English because they were not at all confident to develop their ability to use English in an all-round way, but they felt the pressure to pass the CET, which was considered as more realistic. Some students even gave up the textbook and studied books labelled 'CET reference'.

The CET pass rate could be seen as the 'cut-off point' that determined the teaching efforts, teaching focus and teaching outcomes. The initial goal for both students and teachers was to pass the CET, only after which were they able to develop the ability to use English in an all-encompassing way, as expected. One suggestion was that the CET should be seen as the primary goal, and then efforts should be directed to developing the ability to use English in a fully comprehensive manner, especially in listening and speaking.

Conclusion

The Reform aimed to change the status of teaching-learning English in the hope that

English will be no longer treated only as a linguistic code to be learned but a skill to be socially accepted and students' relatively low proficiency levels can be regarded as obstacles to achieving this aim. It was also one of the goals of the Reform that the way the language is taught and tested would also change in this university. However, the overall social environment still has no better criteria to evaluate university students other than their CET outcomes. Hence, test-orientated teaching was still dominant in the university. It was reported that the reformed teaching focus and forms were excellent for higher level universities, especially the top universities, because they have been offered more flexible teaching arrangements to cater for competence development. For lower level universities and their students, the conclusion would have to be that whether the aims of the Reform can be realised or not depends on the means of implementation over the next few years.

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

It has been six years since the ‘Reform of National English Teaching’ was initiated in 2003. The main focus of the research was to investigate the outcomes in a particular institution that started to implement the Reform from 2005 with reference to such issues as what adjustments have been made to the teaching of English and progress in implementing related aspects of the Reform.

The next section (6.1) provides a brief summary of the answers to the research questions. Section 6.2 compares previous research and my research. Section 6.3 explores implications arising from the research and some recommendations are suggested. Section 6.4 discusses contribution of the research and section 6.5 acknowledges the limitations of the research. Finally, in section 6.6, suggestions are made for further research.

6.1 Brief Summary of Research Findings

Chapter 5 contained detailed discussion of the research questions. Here the findings are briefly reviewed.

1. What have the University authorities done to ensure implementation of the Reform?

For the purpose of improving students’ listening and speaking competence, the University authorities changed the teaching curriculum to focus more on practising listening. At the same time, in order to support students’ autonomous learning after class, the university invested in new multi-media computer rooms and new teaching software. The University authorities understood that there were insufficient computer facilities for all students. They therefore grouped students according to the levels of their English proficiency, and designed the curricula with different requirements for different levels of students. However, due to the the shortage of campus computer facilities, Level B

students were not allowed to use Interactive computer rooms. Therefore, the authorities also changed the Listening Comprehension teaching plans for Level B students to compensate for the lack of practice opportunities with computer facilities.

As regards teachers, one of the most important factors in the implementation, the university was aware of the shortage of experienced teachers and many teachers' limited knowledge of multi-media facilities and the Internet. Therefore, training courses were run for teacher development.

There also existed some deficiencies in authorities' efforts, which will be dealt with in Q4.

2. To what extent have the changes in teaching-learning of English intended by the Reform been implemented with particular reference to teaching and learning of Listening Comprehension?

The emphasis of the Reform was on developing students' all-round ability so that they were able to put English to practical use. Moreover, it emphasised the importance of students' autonomous learning abilities with computers, the Internet and the intranet. The assumption was that more capable, motivated students are able to learn much more with more self-access resources instead of being taught 'lockstep' with lower level students.

More attention has been paid to listening by both teachers and students. The Reform appears to have had a greater influence on higher level students in the sense that they dedicated more time to practising listening with support from teachers and multi-media facilities as well as the Internet.

Textbook packages now emphasise all-round language development with more cultural background information. The CET test has also been redesigned to focus more on learners' listening ability.

3. What use is made of the multi-media facilities by students and teachers to improve students' Listening Comprehension?

The application of multi-media facilities was one of the most important aims of the Reform. In University S, students were required to successfully complete on-line Listening Comprehension assignments after class so that, effectively, they were pushed to use the on-line materials to improve their listening ability. The Internet also allowed students, at least those students in Level A, to have access to unlimited learning resources at any time and anywhere so that they were able to practise listening according to their individual preferences.

Teachers had been trained in the use of the facilities and were required to get in touch with students via the Internet. The application of the multi-media facilities in class had made the teaching process more attractive. Furthermore, the Internet allowed teachers to download 'real-English' material to facilitate teaching and learning. The problems encountered about the facilities will be reviewed in the following part.

4. What obstacles to the implementation of the Reform, if any, have emerged? To what extent could these have been anticipated?

Most significantly, there were either little follow-up measures taken to ensure teachers' self-improvement, or measures to activate teachers' self-improvement. Furthermore, some teachers were still not used to teaching via multi-media facilities and the Internet. With regard to students, lower level students mostly focused on test-orientated practice. They simply aimed to pass the CET for the purpose of graduation and better jobs; therefore, they were not motivated to practise English listening or speaking.

Multi-media facilities were insufficient to meet student demand. This had been anticipated, yet the government authorities did not offer any substitute or supplementary measures to tackle the problem due to the shortage of computer facilities. In reality, however, the available multi-media facilities were not fully used. There were also deficiencies of software design. Flaws in operation or application caused some loss of interest or trust in learning via the network.

Textbook packages recommended by the Reform were criticised because of the topics

and levels of difficulty. In addition, the classroom layout was also found, unexpectedly, during observation to be one of the problems.

6.2 Previous Research and My Research Compared

The findings of this study are similar in some respects to those of previous research and further validate the practicability in particular Chinese circumstances. This section compares previous research with my research in two aspects: English Listening Comprehension teaching and learning and curriculum innovation.

The literature on Listening Comprehension reviewed in Chapter 2 deals with factors influencing comprehension (e.g. Underwood, 1989; Nunan, 1995; and Samuels, 2001), listening comprehension difficulties (e.g. Faerch and Kasper, 1986; Long, 1989; Underwood, 1989; and Brener *et al*, 1996), skills (e.g. Ur, 1984; Field, 1998; Brown, 1990; Rost, 1991; and Field, 2008), and listening comprehension syllabuses (e.g. Underwood, 1989; Rost, 1990; Markee, 1997; and Richards, 2001). My research investigated both factors internal to the learners, such as learning attitudes and proficiency levels, and external factors, such as support from teachers and pressure from CET. Research findings replicated those descriptions. My findings also indicate that all-round ability, especially listening comprehension ability is not easy to develop despite the effort put into this under the Reform.

Researchers (e.g. Nunan, 1988; White, 1988; Fullan, 1991; Morris, 1996; and Markee, 1997) explored problems in implementing a curriculum (section 2.5.2). Chinese and China-based researchers (e.g. Gan, Humphreys and Hamp-Lyons, 2004; Wei, 2005; Li and Qi, 2007; Mo, 2007; Ma and Meng, 2008; and Xia, 2008) who have studied the Reform have discovered similar problems and identified some traditional influences such as the ‘spoon-fed’ teaching system (section 3.3). Problems could be from innovating parties such as policy makers, planners or administrators, and could also be due to adopters such as teachers and learners.

In the Reform in China, innovating parties took steps to avoid possible impractical hypotheses. They also took into account the external context as well as the participants

such as students and universities so that they were in a position to innovate the curriculum in a way that was supported and adopted nationwide. Adopters such as teachers were trained to make changes, though in slow steps, in their teaching methods. Their efforts significantly influenced the outcomes of the Reform. This process reflected that described in Parish and Arrends (1983), discussed in section 2.5.2, that planners and administrators control access and adoptions, whilst teachers control implementation. Furthermore, the research affirmed the importance of teacher training (e.g. Schulz, 2005; Zimmer-Loew, 2008; Lantolf, 2009; and Tedick, 2009), especially in the process of a reform. Another essential adopter, learners, directly affected the achievements of the Reform in the sense that learners’ performance was evidence of whether the Reform was successful or to what extent the changes intended by the Reform had been achieved. Researchers such as Holec (1981), Little (1990), Wenden (1991), Littlewood (1996), Pemberton (1996), Healey (1999), and Beatty (2003) argue that autonomy is influenced by factors ranging from personality to the cultural context, and can be developed with support from teachers. My research findings showed that in the Reform in China, autonomous learning had not yet been realised and the causal factors were summed up as learners’ strategies, motivation, established habits, available support, and the social and economic environment (see Chapter 5).

An example of detailed comparison between previous research in China and my own research findings can be found in Table 6.1:

Table 6.1 Previous research in China and my research on the Reform

	Previous research findings (see Chapter 3)	My research findings (see Chapter 5)
Autonomous learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difference between successful and unsuccessful students (Gan, Humphreys and Hamp-Lyons, 2004; and Wang, 2005) • ‘Limited autonomy’ is suggested (Chen, 2006) • Teacher involvement (Jiang, 2006) • Autonomous learning has not yet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difference between students of high English proficiency and of low English proficiency • A mode of ‘Autonomous learning with teachers’ instruction’ was suggested. • Support from teachers was necessary. • Autonomous learning has not yet

	<p>been realised nationwide (e.g. Liu, Ke and Liu, 2005; Zhu, 2005; and He and Zhong, 2007)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers did not offer guidance on learning strategies or advice on adapting to new learning habits (Ma and Meng, 2008) 	<p>been realised.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Motivation influenced autonomous learning. Students' have been used to be 'spoon-fed'.
Multi-media facilities & the Internet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Internet/ the intranet is helpful (e.g. Ying, 2005; Gong and Zhu, 2006; Gu, 2007; and Ma and Meng, 2008) Problems due to teachers' ability to operate facilities and use the Internet (e.g. Wang and Sun, 2005; and Mao, 2007) Problems due to the access to the facilities (e.g. Liu et al. 2005; and He and Zhong, 2007) Problems of software design (e.g. Chen, 2006; and Jia, 2006b) Problems due to students' ability to use the facilities (e.g. Liu et al, 2005; Wang and Zhao, 2006; and Liu and Kong, 2008) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Internet/ the intranet was helpful. The application of facilities varied due to differing competence of teachers. Problems due to the access to the facilities There were not enough facilities, but the available facilities were not taken full advantage of. Problems of software design Problems of classroom layout Support from technical staff was helpful. It is not necessary to install advanced facilities for basic practice or for students of lower levels of English proficiency. Interactive computer rooms found to be helpful but there were problems due to software design.
Textbooks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some students were satisfied with the new textbook package (Ying, 2005) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most teachers and students were satisfied with the textbook package used in the researched university, but did not support those four packages designed for

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers and students also play vital roles (Xia, 2008) • Some texts were regarded as too difficult (Lou, 2005) • There were too many optional forms and too much network-supported input (Lou, 2005) 	<p>the Reform.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whether the textbooks are made full use of also depended on teachers' use of them. • Teachers and students were not satisfied with the topics in the textbooks recommended but preferred the topics in the textbook they were using. • Selection of textbooks was also influenced by the layout.
Testing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test-orientated learning still prevails (e.g. Li and Qi, 2007) • Washback effect on teaching and learning English (e.g. Wei, 2005; and Cai, 2007) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test-orientated teaching and learning still prevails. • Listening comprehension was practised for CET. • CET pass rate was given priority over all-round ability development.

The table shows some similarities between previous research and my own research, though there are some outcomes that other researchers did not mention, such as the problems of the multi-media facilities due to the classroom layout, the problems of the interactive computer rooms, and teachers' improper use of textbooks.

6.3 *Implications Arising from the Research and Some Recommendations*

In this section, implications and recommendations are discussed in relation to implementation of the Reform, teacher development, learner training, facilities, learning resources and the CET examination.

Implementation of the Reform

The revised College English Curriculum Teaching Requirements aimed at shifts

ranging from the teaching-learning focus to the ultimate objective (see Section 3.1.2). Data analysis showed that at the time of the research none of these shifts had been fully achieved. There are several possible reasons for this. Firstly, it is neither easy to switch from a focus on language knowledge to *all-round competence* or easy to switch from teacher-centred to *student-centred* teaching-learning because teachers and students are so used to the established ways. Secondly, *autonomous learning* for most Chinese university students is an ideal stage because they have been used to learn what they are told and under the provisions of the Reform, there was insufficient guidance on how to learn. Thirdly, the limited facilities and insufficient competence on the part of both teachers and students in using the facilities hindered the full application of *network-based learning*. Finally, the research findings indicate that test-orientated teaching-learning was still prevalent and *competence-orientated teaching-learning* will only be available when there is no pressure from the test.

This does not mean that the Reform is a failure in the sense that the anticipated aims have not yet been achieved. As suggested by White (1988), there exist four stages in the dissemination and adoption of an innovation (see section 2.2). It seems that teachers and learners in China were in the process of the second stage when the adopters started to actively take on the innovation. At this stage, teachers and learners have been informed of, or forced to realise, the necessity for change and they were at least aware of the shifts expected (see Chapter 5). In the subsequent stages, some of the problems identified in the thesis may have been solved and the outcomes may be more positive.

Teacher development

Teachers were the key to the success of the Reform. Researchers such as Schulz (2000) and Lantolf (2009), mentioned in 2.9.1, argue that teachers need to be trained with appropriate knowledge to develop students' high level of proficiency. The data showed that there were problems in the implementation of the Reform because of the lack of appropriate teacher education. Students' all-round ability, especially listening and speaking, had not been enhanced at the first stage because of the limited competence of

teachers themselves. Also, due to teachers' limited experience of life in native English-speaking countries, many students rarely had enough cultural background knowledge, which would have been very helpful in understanding the language.

With regard to the ability to use multi-media facilities, younger teachers, comparatively speaking, were more competent in their exploitation of the Internet and the intranet, but it was still too demanding for some senior teachers to introduce English learning websites or to frequently get in touch with students via the network. When the research was carried out, there were still many teachers who did not make use of the Internet to introduce language learning resources, cultural background or to simply keep in touch with their students.

Considering the above problems, there is a need for teachers to develop their competence in using multi-media facilities, as well as their listening and speaking skills. Therefore, training courses or workshops sponsored by the government and university authorities are recommended to run on a regular basis; at the same time, teachers must make an effort to develop the skills needed by themselves. Furthermore, not every university trained their teachers. It was taken for granted that one must be responsible for him / herself in order to be continuously competitive as a teacher in a top university, otherwise, s/he might be dismissed on the grounds of 'being unqualified', having been judged unsuccessful by both the University and the students.

Students' autonomous learning

As noted in 2.9.2 and 3.3.1, students' autonomous learning is influenced by social factors, learners' proficiency level; learners' attitude; and support from teachers or facilities available (Wender, 1991; Littlewood, 1996; Healey, 1999; Palfreyman, 2003; and Lin, 2008). The research has shown that higher level students learned English for their future career and they were more willing to study and practise English both in the classroom and outside in their daily lives. Comparatively, those students with lower English levels could not see any connection between their English competence and their future, or held what Wenden (1991:58) has termed 'a negative self-image'. Consequently,

their purpose of learning English was just to pass the CET and there was a lack of motivation to learn autonomously.

Moreover, many students have been used to being dependent (Wenden, 1991) and still preferred teachers to tell them what they should do and how much they should learn. One of the reasons was that they were used to being 'pushed' or 'spoon-fed' in high schools. One implication is that there is a need for a pedagogical change in high school teaching-learning because of the imbalance between 'test-orientated' high school learning and 'relaxed' but 'self-disciplined' university life. The current situation requires too abrupt a shift. A complementary suggestion made by several informants was that a model of semi-autonomous study might be more appropriate, at least for lower-level university students. This would involve some combination of teacher instruction and an autonomous study. In addition, teachers are suggested to take the role to provide a bridge for students to learn in universities. For example, classroom teaching and learning could also refer to outside classroom assignment so that students are pushed to learn after class.

Rational use of multi-media facilities and the Internet

According to previous studies reviewed in 2.9.4 and 3.3.2, multi-media facilities and the Internet are helpful in enhancing English Listening Comprehension ability (see e.g. Levy, 1997; Bishop, 1999; Beatty, 2003; and Li, 2005b). Introducing multi-media facilities into the classrooms of University S has proved that they were able to enhance English learning to a great extent, but problems were inevitable when the Internet, the intranet and multi-media facilities were widely employed in teaching-learning.

First of all, research in University S found that multi-media facilities would be simply another 'technological teacher-centred' model if there was little or no interaction between teachers and learners. This confirms the point made in 2.9.4 that there are clearly limits to the ways in which software is able to take the place of a teacher (e.g. Tripp, 1993; and Beatty, 2003). That is to say, a combination of multi-media facilities plus the involvement of teachers is much more effective. For example, on-line communication with students might take some time and add to teachers' workloads for teachers, but it could be an

efficient way to establish trust between teachers and students and encourage learners' motivation for learning. Besides, as well as teachers, some students have not yet fully adapted to teaching-learning via the Internet and the intranet.

Problems relating to students and teachers have been discovered and classified. Students' ability to use the facilities was still weak due to their vastly different backgrounds; teachers' ability to operate facilities and use the Internet needs to be improved and needs to be at the same pace as technological development. Access to computers or the Internet was not promised because of the limited facilities, and some lower level students were deprived of the rights to use some advanced facilities. Therefore, one possibility would be to stagger computer-room hours so that the limited facilities are guaranteed for more students. It is equally important that the available facilities should be fully used. The research findings confirm Willis's (1983) point that computers can be overused and misused if they are doing a job which could be as well or even better done with the help of a simpler aid. That is to say, for those students of lower level English proficiency, less advanced facilities would be adequate to practise basic skills.

From the analysis, the authorities' suggestion of introducing computer facilities and the Internet into teaching-learning was positive to a certain extent, provided that these were rationally used and students were supported with proper instruction. At the same time, it is important, as Kenner (1990) has observed, that the more students use computers, the more learning hardware and software need to be upgraded to keep pace with the students' improvement. Otherwise, it would be a waste of investment and even affect the development of students' English competence.

It is also advisable for the Government to offer some alternative measures due to the limited facilities in some universities. For example, some public computer facilities could be shared by several universities.

Choice of teaching and learning materials

The role of appropriate textbooks or supplementary materials has been studied by researchers such as Nunan (1988), Cunningsworth (1995), Richards (2001), McGrath

(2002), and Ying (2005) (see 2.9.3 and 3.3.3). The four series of textbooks recommended by the Reform were not evaluated highly during the investigation because the topics were criticised as being boring or too serious and some were too difficult for the average student. Besides, the layout and format of a page also affected whether that textbook was seen as attractive or not.

The textbook package used in University S was felt to be better than the other four, and it was also reported from questionnaires and interviews that students' listening ability had been enhanced. However there still existed some problems. The various optional forms in which the texts were available and the variety of learning focuses made it possible for learners to have more choices as per their individual needs, but it also led to problems when they had to make decisions on learning with 'text only', 'audio', or 'video'. Moreover, it was possible that learners were distracted by the pictures or actors / actresses in 'video' programmes.

Teaching materials can be valuable resources, but students and teachers play vital roles in using textbooks. On the one hand, students might not benefit at all from excellent information if they do not prepare or do any follow-up assignments. On the other hand, poor teachers might make useful content meaningless. It is particularly important that teachers take advantage of textbooks but do not rely on textbooks only because of the differences of their students. It is desirable for them to integrate supplementary materials according to the levels of their students and they need to update all the materials frequently. This seems to coincide with the claims of Cunningsworth (1995) and Richards (2001) that while textbooks offer support to less experienced teachers, they can also be a useful reference for experienced and confident teachers, who may wish to use them more selectively.

The research also showed that higher level students might actively search for learning materials to improve their English competence, but lower level students might not be interested in any extra learning in addition to their classroom study. Therefore, it is suggested that textbook designers could take the users' requirements and interest into consideration, and offer informative and attractive materials for learners.

The role of CET

CET is an important English examination for College students, and researchers such as Gao (2003), Liu and Dai (2004), and Wang (2006) have investigated its influence on English teaching and learning (see 3.1.3). From data analysis, the society still had no better criteria to evaluate the university students other than their CET outcomes. It is true that the CET test plays a vital role in College English teaching-learning, but it should not be, in any sense, the only aim.

The emphasis of the CET could be switched more to listening and speaking ability. That is to say, policy makers and the authorities still need to improve the test format for a better enhancement of students' all-round ability.

6.4 Contribution of the Research

This research has provided a detailed account of the implementation of the Reform in a particular university. Achievements have been indicated and problems explored. The study is therefore significant in providing much needed empirical data regarding policy makers, textbook editors and teachers' as well as students' conceptions. It has generated qualitative and quantitative insights into the actual implementation of innovation of English teaching-learning.

There have been studies investigating the impact of the Reform in other universities. Most of this has focused on a single aspect of the Reform such as multi-media facilities, shift of teachers' role, or autonomous learning in a single institution. My research was also a small-scale investigation; yet, it attempted to study the implementation of the Reform in a number of key and related aspects: teaching-learning strategies, facilities, evaluation system, as well as teachers' and students' development. Such an in-depth investigation has the potential to inform other Chinese researchers or international research studies. Moreover, questionnaires were the most popular method used in previous studies, and few researchers had claimed to have used data from observation. My research applied both quantitative and qualitative methods, namely, questionnaires,

individual interviews and group interviews, observations, and document review.

Furthermore, this research involved the Administrator of the Reform in the province, as well as the Chief Editor of the textbook packages, who have offered very different viewpoints from teachers or students.

The research disclosed some obstacles that had rarely been discussed by other researchers such as the deficient layout of the multimedia classrooms, though many findings replicate other research so that reliability and validity are guaranteed.

For international researchers who are interested in language teaching and teaching innovation in Asian countries or in developing countries, this research offers a reference point and insights. As discussed in 6.2, the research findings are consistent with the literature on this topic. More broadly, this research investigated the national Reform in China and explored problems in implementing the Reform, which seems to be in accordance with the '*Research, development, and diffusion model*' (Chin & Benne, 1976; and Markee, 1997) reviewed in section 2.2. In addition, the research has probed the practical application of the Reform in the particular context of China as regards how to develop learners' all-round ability as well as autonomous learning with support such as teachers and accessible facilities.

Lastly, implications arising from the research and some recommendations were made in 6.3 for policy makers, administrators, textbook designers, software designers, teachers and students so that the Reform can proceed more smoothly in later stages.

6.5 Limitations of the Research

Given the nature of PhD study (single-handed, limited-duration), it is inevitable that research will have certain inbuilt limitations. These are acknowledged below.

- This study, as indicated in the title, covers three major topics, namely: curriculum innovation, listening comprehension and English teaching reform. This breadth inevitably limited the depth with which each of these topics could be investigated. While acknowledging this, I would argue that the breadth was necessary in order to provide an appropriate context for the detailed study of listening comprehension as a

6.6 Suggestions for Further Research

With regard to the above mentioned limitations in section 6.4, the following suggestions are made for further research:

- This research explored some problems in implementing the Reform in 2007. Follow-up research is needed to investigate whether the problems identified have been dealt with.
- Research is needed to investigate the implementation of the Reform in universities of various levels, such as universities in developed cities with advanced technology and facilities, and institutions in less developed cities or remote area, to provide a more complete profile of the implementation in the whole country.
- Further research could explore other aspects of students' language competence; since the Reform prioritised students' spoken English, this would be an obvious focus.
- This research explored the implementation of the Reform mostly from the standpoints of teachers and students; there would be value in seeking the views of government authorities and policy makers if access could be negotiated.
- Future research could also focus solely on teachers or students for a much more in-depth understanding of their reflection on some particular changes involved in innovation. For instance, a study could be carried out to explore changes in students' attitudes and behaviour after the introduction of on-line self-directed learning.

To sum up these suggestions for further research, in order to obtain a better understanding of the problems associated with educational innovation, research is needed on a whole range of interlinked elements, from policy decision-making and how policies are interpreted to their effect on the individual student. Research along these lines can contribute to better decision-making.

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APPENDIX I Classroom Observation Record Form

TEACHER:	CLASSROOM :	DATE:	NO. OF STUDENTS:	FILE NO.:
OBSERVER:	LOCATION OF THE OBSERVER: ROW LINE	TIME: FROM TO	MAJOR OF STUDENTS:	
TIME WHEN TEACHER COMES INTO THE CLASSROOM:	BEFORE THE CLASS:			
TIME WHEN STUDENTS COME INTO THE CLASSROOM :				
PROGRESS OF THE CLASS				
TIME:	CONTENTS:			
AFTER THE CLASS:				
REMARK:				

APPENDIX II Questionnaire for Students in April 2007 (Pilot Study, Chinese Version)

关于大学英语教学改革的问卷（2007 年 4 月）

I、个人信息：

- 1、一年级 ☐ 二年级 ☐ 三年级 ☐

- 2、所在学院： _____
专业： _____

II、英语学习

- 3、每周英语课时总数为： _____ 课时

- 4、英语课前预习吗？ 预习 ☐ 不预习 ☐

· 请选择你常预习的课程：

- 精读 快速阅读 阅读 听力 写作 口语
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

- 5、英语课后通常复习吗？ 复习 ☐ 不复习 ☐

请选择你常复习的课程：

- 精读 快速阅读 阅读 听力 写作 口语
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

- 6、平均每周听力有几课时？ _____

- 7、你认为课堂听力练习是否有助提高听力？

- 非常有助 某些方面有助 不知道 不是很有助 一点没用 纯粹浪费时间
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

- 8、你认为听力课本是否有用？

- 非常出色 还可以 不知道 不好 一点没用
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

- 9、你认为听力课本中的听力材料难易程度如何？

- 太难 有些太难 难易正好 容易 太简单
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

- 10、你认为你的英语听力教师是否对你的听力提高有帮助？

- 非常有帮助 某些方面 不知道 不是很有帮助 根本没有帮助
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

11、你是否曾经学习过如何利用计算机软件/网络来提高听力水平?
曾经有详细的指导学过如何使用计算机软件/网络 ☐
学过，但是不详细 ☐
要学，但是还没有开始 ☐
没有学过，但是已经会用了 ☐
没有学习过如何利用计算机软件/网络来提高英语听力 ☐
从来没有学习过可以利用计算机软件/网络 ☐

12、你认为与计算机互动来学习英语听力有用吗?
非常有用 某些方面有用 不知道 不是很有用 根本没用
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

III、课内外英语听力练习

13、课外你经常练习英语听力吗?
每周数次 每周1次 少于每周1次 每月 从来不练习
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

14、课后你通常选择哪些场所练习英语听力? (请选择所有相关项)
教室 宿舍 图书馆 校园 家 电脑房 其他 _____
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

15、你通常用什么方式来提高英语听力能力? (请选择所有相关项)
在课堂上紧跟教师的节奏 ☐
听英语歌曲 ☐
听教科书的教学磁带 ☐
听其他书籍的英语听力材料 ☐
通过互联网听英语 ☐
通过校园网听与教材相关的听力材料 ☐
听英语广播 ☐
看英语电影 ☐
和同学练习对话 ☐
和英语国家人士练习对话 ☐

16、在课后能接触到计算机用于练习英语吗?
可以 有时候 不太有机会 没有机会
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

17、通过课内或课外的练习，你认为你的英语听力能力有所提高吗?
很有提高 略有提高 不知道 根本没有提高
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

APPENDIX III Questionnaire for Students in April 2007 (Pilot Study, English Version)

I. Personal Information:

1. First year student Second year student Third year student
☐ ☐ ☐

2. Faculty: _____
Major: _____

II. English Study

3. How many English class hours in total do you have each week? _____

4 Do you do anything to prepare for your English class? Yes ☐ No ☐

Please tick the courses you prepare for:

Intensive Reading ☐
Fast Reading ☐
Reading ☐
Listening Comprehension ☐
Writing ☐
Spoken English ☐

5. Do you do any follow-up work after these courses? Yes ☐ No ☐

Please tick the courses you do follow-up work for:

Intensive Reading ☐
Fast Reading ☐
Reading ☐
Listening Comprehension ☐
Writing ☐
Spoken English ☐

6. How many English Listening Comprehension hours do you have each week?

7. How helpful do you think the practice of Listening Comprehension in class?

Very Helpful in some aspects Do not know Not very Not at all A waste of time
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

8. How useful is your English Listening Comprehension book?

Excellent Good Do not know Not so good Not good at all
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

- Listen to the listening comprehension materials via the Internet☐
- Listen to the listening comprehension materials related to the textbooks via intranet☐
- Listen to the English radio broadcast☐
- Practise dialogues with peers☐
- Practise dialogues with native English speakers☐

16. Have you got the access to computers for practising English?

- Yes☐
- Sometimes☐
- Not very often☐
- No☐

17. Have you improved your Listening ability by practising both inside and outside the class?

- Improved a lot☐
- Improved☐
- Do not know☐
- Not at all☐

Thank you very much for completing the questionnaire!

10、英语课后通常复习吗？复习 ☐ 不复习 ☐

请选择你常复习的课程：

精读 ☐ 快速阅读 ☐ 阅读 ☐ 听力 ☐ 写作 ☐ 口语 ☐

11、平均每周听力有几课时？ _____

12、你认为课堂听力练习是否有助提高听力？

非常有助 ☐ 某些方面有助 ☐ 不知道 ☐ 不是很有助 ☐ 一点没用 ☐ 纯粹浪费时间 ☐

13、你认为听力课本是否有用？

非常出色 ☐ 还可以 ☐ 不知道 ☐ 不好 ☐ 一点没用 ☐

14、你认为听力课本中的听力材料难易程度如何？

太难 ☐ 有些太难 ☐ 难易正好 ☐ 容易 ☐ 太简单 ☐

15、在听力练习中，你是否尝试听清楚每一个词？

是的，很想听懂每个单词 ☐
听不懂所有的单词，所以只希望听懂大意 ☐
先看问题问什么，只希望听懂问题中提到的部分 ☐
不知道到底该听什么 ☐
通常听不懂在说什么，只是猜测答案 ☐

16、你认为你的英语听力教师是否对你的听力提高有帮助？

非常有帮助 ☐ 某些方面 ☐ 不知道 ☐ 不是很有帮助 ☐ 根本没有帮助 ☐

17、大学英语老师是否把作业布置在网上？

是，每次都是网上作业 ☐
是，经常 ☐
偶尔布置在网上 ☐
从来不布置在网上 ☐

18、大学英语老师是否通过网络和你们保持联系？

总是 ☐ 经常 ☐ 很少 ☐ 从来不用网络联系 ☐

III、课内外英语听力练习

19、课外你经常练习英语听力吗？

每周数次 ☐ 每周1次 ☐ 少于每周1次 ☐ 每月 ☐ 从来不练习 ☐

20、课后你通常选择哪些场所联系英语听力？（请选择所有相关项）
教室 宿舍 图书馆 校园 家 电脑房 其他 _____
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

21 学校是否安排免费英语电影赏析？
经常有 偶尔有 没有 不知道
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

22、你比较适合哪种英语学习方式和学习氛围？
喜欢独自一人练习 ☐
喜欢在集体场合练习 ☐
喜欢听老师讲，不喜欢独立思考 ☐

23、你能自主学习吗？
能自己选择教学内容，很快融入学习中 ☐
说不准，自主性难以把握； ☐
不需要老师监督，能自主自觉地学习 ☐
更愿意接受老师的监督学习 ☐
如果老师布置些任务，则更容易让自己学习 ☐

24、你通常用什么方式来提高英语听力能力？（请选择所有相关项）
在课堂上紧跟教师的节奏 ☐
听英语歌曲 ☐
听教科书的教学磁带 ☐
听其他书籍的英语听力材料 ☐
通过互联网听英语 ☐
通过校园网听与教材相关的听力材料 ☐
听英语广播 ☐
看英语电影 ☐
和同学练习对话 ☐
和英语国家人士练习对话 ☐

25、是否有机会和外籍教师对话？
经常有机会 ☐
去英语角和外籍人士对话 ☐
有时有机会，但习惯听，不喜欢说 ☐
很少，我英语听说能力差，不喜欢这样的场合 ☐

26、在课后能接触到计算机用于练习英语吗？
可以 有时候 不太有机会 没有机会
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

请继续反面 →

27、你通过网络主要完成哪些事？

学习练习英语 ☐

上网查阅学习资料 ☐

游戏 ☐

聊天 ☐

看电影 ☐

查阅学习以外的生活资料 ☐

其他： _____

28、你是否曾经学习过如何利用计算机软件/网络来提高听力水平？

曾经有详细的指导学过如何使用计算机软件/网络 ☐

学过，但是不详细 ☐

要学，但是还没有开始 ☐

没有学过，但是已经会用了 ☐

没有学习过如何利用计算机软件/网络来提高英语听力 ☐

从来没有学习过可以利用计算机软件/网络 ☐

29、你认为与计算机互动来学习英语听力有用吗？

非常有用 某些方面有用 不知道 不是很有用 根本没用

☐

☐

☐

☐

☐

30、你尝试使用过学校的人机对话语音室吗？

*是的，用过 ☐

经常使用 ☐

偶尔使用 ☐

满意效果 ☐

基本满意效果 ☐

对效果很失望 ☐

你希望这个人人机对话语音室是怎样的？ _____

*没有用过 ☐

不知道有这样一个语音室 ☐

知道，但是没有考虑过去使用 ☐

听说效果不好，所以没有去使用 ☐

特地去语音教室太麻烦 ☐

31、你认为那种方式更适合自己的听力水平提高？（可选 1 至 3 项）

反复听教材的磁带或 CD ☐

听英语新闻 ☐

看英语电影 ☐

中国教师上英语课 ☐

外教上课 ☐

人机互动练习 ☐

四六级试题 ☐

与母语为英语的外籍人士对话 ☐

找机会和中国的英语老师对话 ☐

其他： _____

32、 对你来说，听力的难度最主要体现在哪些方面？

- | | | | |
|---------------|--------------------------|------------|--------------------------|
| 缺少语言环境 | <input type="checkbox"/> | 缺少外籍教师 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 缺少好的教材 | <input type="checkbox"/> | 缺少学习的兴趣和动力 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 英语语法词汇等基础薄弱 | <input type="checkbox"/> | 缺少英语背景知识 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 课后缺少练习的场所和途径 | <input type="checkbox"/> | | |
| 学校对听力单科的重视还不够 | <input type="checkbox"/> | | |
| 其他： | <input type="text"/> | | |

33、通过课内或课外的练习，你认为你的英语听力能力有所提高吗？

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 很有提高 | 略有提高 | 不知道 | 根本没有提高 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

34、学习中遇到问题时，如何解决？

- | | | | |
|-----------|--------------------------|----------|--------------------------|
| 完全靠自己 | <input type="checkbox"/> | 与别人共同解决 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 问老师或同学 | <input type="checkbox"/> | 没有遇到什么问题 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 不特地想办法去解决 | <input type="checkbox"/> | | |

35、 学校还能提供哪些方面的设施或者哪些方面的帮助，可以帮助你听力能力提高？

非常感谢你完成问卷！

carefully selected example of the innovation represented by reform in a specific context.

- The data was collected between October and December in 2007 and this thesis was completed in 2009. In this period, more progress towards implementation may have been made and attempts made to tackle some of the problems identified here.
- This study involved 227 students and 20 teachers and took place in one university in China. Hence, it was a relatively small scale study. However, careful attempts were made to select an appropriate student sample, i.e., Year 1 students and Year 2 students of different majors; moreover, all the full-time College English teachers have been involved in the research.
- Due to difficulty of access, interviews with national government authorities and curriculum policy makers were not possible. Interpretation of requirements and policy were based solely on official documents and publications. However, the Administrator who was in charge of the Reform in the province was interviewed. In addition, the Chief Editor of the textbook used in University S was also interviewed to have an overall view how the textbook was designed to incorporate the requirements of the Reform.
- Interviewees were all informed that the conversation would be recorded; therefore, they might have been particularly careful about what they said (and did not say). Participants might have offered the kinds of answer they thought the researcher (or others) might want to hear.
- In the classroom observations, my presence might have influenced not only students but also teachers. On the one hand, students might not behave exactly the same as they usually did and on the other hand, teachers might have changed their usual teaching schedule. For example, no student was observed to play games or watch movies in multi-media classrooms during the course, but it was reported by technological staff that some students did this sometime.
- Both questionnaires and interviews were carried out in Chinese, and English translations and quotations from these are based on the researcher's interpretations.

APPENDIX V Questionnaire for Students in November 2007

(Main Research, English Version)

I. Personal Information:

1. First-year student ☐ Second-year student ☐ Third-year student ☐

2. Faculty: _____
Major: _____

II. English Study

3. Do you attach more importance on your major or English study?

The major is more important for me ☐
Both my major and English are very important for me ☐
I hope to be good at both my major and English as well, but due to limited time, I attach more importance to my major ☐
I hope to be good at both my major and English as well, but due to limited time, I attach more importance to English ☐
English is more important for me ☐

4. The motivation for learning English is:

To pass the CET ☐
To facilitate job hunting ☐
To obtain the degree, otherwise the University will not grant the degree ☐
To have fun in learning English ☐

5. Do you enjoy in learning English?

Yes ☐
A little ☐
Not at all. It is painful to learn English ☐

6. What kinds of activities would enhance your interest in learning English?

7. How many English class hours in total do you have each week? _____

8. What was your score in the English exam last term?

Less than 60 ☐ 60-70 ☐ 70-80 ☐
80-90 ☐ More than 90 ☐

To be continued on the reverse →

9. Do you do anything to prepare for your English classes? Yes ☐ No ☐

Please tick the courses you prepare for:

- Intensive Reading ☐
- Fast Reading ☐
- Reading ☐
- Listening Comprehension ☐
- Writing ☐
- Spoken English ☐

10. Do you do any follow-up work after these classes? Yes ☐ No ☐

Please tick the courses you do follow-up work for:

- Intensive Reading ☐
- Fast Reading ☐
- Reading ☐
- Listening Comprehension ☐
- Writing ☐
- Spoken English ☐

11. How many English Listening Comprehension hours do you have each week?

12. How helpful do you think the practice of Listening Comprehension is in class?

- | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Very | Helpful in some aspects | Do not know | Not very | Not at all | A waste of time |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

13. How useful is your English Listening Comprehension book?

- | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Excellent | Good | Do not know | Not so good | Not good at all |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

14. How easy is the listening material in the textbook?

- | | | | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Too difficult | Difficult in some chapters | Just right | Easy | Too easy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

15. Do you try to understand every word in your listening?

- Yes, I hope to understand every word ☐
- I could not understand every word, so I just try to grasp the main idea ☐
- I usually look at the questions first, and just listen to those related to the questions ☐
- I do not know what to listen to at all ☐
- I do not usually understand, so I just guess the answers ☐

16. How helpful is the teacher in facilitating your listening comprehension?

Very Helpful in some aspects Do not know Not always Not at all
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

17. Does the English teacher set assignments via the Net?

Yes, every time ☐
 Yes, often ☐
 Sometimes ☐
 Never ☐

18. Does the English teacher get in touch with you via the Net?

Always Often Seldom Never
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

III. Practising English Listening Comprehension

19. How often do you practise Listening Comprehension out of class?

Several times each week ☐
 Once a week ☐
 Less than once a week ☐
 Every month ☐
 Never ☐

20. Where do you usually choose to study English Listening Comprehension after class?

Classroom Dormitory Library Campus Back home Computer room
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Other: _____

21. Are there any chances to see English movies arranged by the University?

Yes Sometimes No Do not know
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

22. How do you prefer to learn English?

Practising by myself ☐
 Practising with peers ☐
 Prefer to listen to the teachers instead of self-motivated learning or thinking ☐

23. Are you able to learn autonomously?

Yes, I can organise my learning very well ☐
 I am not sure, not so autonomously ☐
 Yes, most of the time I can learn without the teachers' supervision ☐
 Preferably with teachers' supervision ☐

To be continued on the reverse →

I can learn better when the teachers arrange some assignment ☐

24. How do you prefer to improve your listening comprehension outside the class?

(Please tick all relevant boxes)

- Follow the steps as instructed by the teachers in class ☐
Listen to English songs ☐
Listen to tapes of the textbooks ☐
Listen to listening comprehension materials from other books ☐
Listen to listening comprehension materials via the Internet ☐
Listen to listening comprehension materials related to the textbooks via the intranet ☐
Listen to English radio broadcasts ☐
Practise dialogues with peers ☐
Practise dialogues with native English speakers ☐

25. Do you usually have the opportunity to have conversations with native English speakers?

- Very often ☐
Only at English Corner ☐
Sometimes, but I prefer to listen instead of speaking ☐
Seldom. My English is poor, so I do not like to have conversations with native speakers ☐

26. Can you get access to a computer to practise listening comprehension after class?

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Yes | Sometimes | Chances are very few | Not at all |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

27. What do you usually do via the Internet?

- Learning ☐
Searching for information for my studies ☐
Playing games ☐
Chatting ☐
Searching for information unrelated to studying ☐
Other: _____

28. Have you been instructed how to use the computer to improve your listening comprehension?

- Yes, detailed instructions have been given ☐
Yes, but not in detail ☐
Yes, but not yet, maybe later ☐
No, no instructions about using the computer to practise listening comprehension have been given ☐
No, no one has ever said anything about the facilities ☐

29. Do you think interactive practice with a computer is helpful to improve your listening comprehension?

- Yes, it helps a lot ☐
Yes, it helps in some aspects ☐
I do not know ☐
No, it is not so helpful ☐
No, it is not helpful at all ☐

30. Have you ever tried the Interactive Computer Room in the University?

*Yes. ☐

- | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Often | Sometimes | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Very Satisfied | Satisfied | Not satisfied |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

What do you expect from this Computer Room?

*No. ☐

- Didn' t know this Room was available ☐
I know there is an Interactive Computer Room, but have not been there ☐
I was told about that it was unsatisfactory by others, so I did not go ☐
It is troublesome to go to the Computer Room ☐

31. Which do you think is best for you to improve your listening comprehension?

(You may choose 1- 3 from the following)

- Listening to the tapes / CDs of the textbook ☐
Listening to English broadcasts ☐
Seeing English movies ☐
Taking lectures given by Chinese teachers ☐
Taking lectures given by native English teachers ☐
Interactive practising with the computers ☐
Doing exercises from CET4 & CET6 ☐
Having conversation with native English speakers ☐
Having conversation with Chinese English teachers ☐
Other: _____

32. What are the most difficult factors in your listening comprehension?

- Lack of English surroundings ☐
Lack of native English speakers to be teachers ☐

To be continued on the reverse →

- Lack of suitable textbooks ☐
- Lack of interest and motivation ☐
- Weak knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary ☐
- Lack of English cultural background ☐
- Lack of practice due to limited approach and environment ☐
- Lack of support from the University on Listening Comprehension ☐

33. Do you think your listening ability has improved by practicing both inside and outside the class?

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Improved a lot | Improved a little | Do not know | Not improved at all |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

34. How do you deal with problems during your study?

- Problems were solved all by myself ☐
- Problems were solved with others' help ☐
- Teachers or classmates solved the problems ☐
- Did not have any problems ☐
- Leave the problems ☐

35. What else should the university offer to improve your listening comprehension?

Thank you very much for completing the questionnaire!

APPENDIX VI Questionnaire for Teachers in November 2007
(Main Research, Chinese Version)

关于大学英语教学改革问卷 （2007 年 10 月）

- 1、您的教龄：_____
- 2、您在浙江树人大学教授大学英语听力的年数：_____
- 3、您所教的大学英语听力学生的专业年级：_____

- 4、您所使用的大学英语听力教材：
- 新编大学英语视听说教程（浙江大学编著，外语教学与研究出版社） ☐
- 大学体验英语听说教程（大学体验英语项目组，高等教育出版社） ☐
- 全新版大学英语听说教程（上海外语教育出版社） ☐
- 新视野大学英语听说教程（外语教学与研究出版社） ☐
- 其他 ☐：_____

- 5、您所使用的大学英语听力教材有哪些版本？
- 文字版 网络版 多媒体学习课件 电子教案
- ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
- 其他 ☐：_____

- 6、平时的教学过程中主要用到哪些版本的教材？
- 文字版 网络版 多媒体学习课件 电子教案
- ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
- 其他 ☐：_____

- 7、教材的配套材料是否完善？
- 课后辅助听力材料 教材配套磁带 教材配套光盘 网络听力资源 多媒体课件
- ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
- 其他 ☐：_____

- 8、教材中的题材是否适合本校的学生学习？
- 题材很合适，学生普遍都有兴趣 ☐
- 题材也许适合某些专业领域的学生，但不是所有专业的学生都有兴趣 ☐
- 大多数学生都对这些题材没有兴趣，觉得脱离实际生活需要 ☐
- 大多数学生都对这些题材没有兴趣，觉得内容太难 ☐
- 虽然学生觉得这些题材偏难，但是从学习的角度讲仍然属于难度合理 ☐
- 教材涉及的题材过于浅显 ☐

- 9、所使用的教材中哪些是比较满意的？

题材 课文 版面 习题 结构 教师参考书 电子教案 网络素材 配套资源如 CD 或磁带等
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

10、所使用的教材中哪些是最不满意的？

题材 课文 版面 习题 结构 教师参考书 电子教案 网络素材 配套资源如 CD 或磁带等
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

11、大学英语教学改革后您觉得变化最大的是哪（些）方面？

教材 ☐ 新的‘大学英语课程要求’代替原来的‘教学大纲’ ☐
 加强网络的利用率 ☐ 更高地要求学生自主学习 ☐
 学生考试压力增加了 ☐ 学生考试压力减小了 ☐
 教师的工作量，压力增加了 ☐ 教师的工作量，压力减小了 ☐
 弱化语法教学 ☐ 教师更容易因材施教 ☐
 其他: _____

12、大学英语教学改革后，大量推出了电子版的授课内容，开始授课前是否培训过如何使用教学设备？

学校统一进行了详细的培训 ☐ 培训的时间: ____年__月

学校培训了,但是还有些设备的功能介绍不是很详细 ☐

没有培训 ☐

已经使用相当熟练,不需要再培训了 ☐

13、学校的电教设施是否足够您的教学需要？

☐ 足够 ☐ 基本够 ☐ 不太够用 ☐ 缺少我希望使用的一些设备

14、您是否善于操作这些电脑及网络授课？

非常擅长	<input type="checkbox"/>
熟悉，一般操作都能非常胜任	<input type="checkbox"/>
不擅长，但是使用顺利，上课所需的一般操作都可以	<input type="checkbox"/>
使用过程中经常有故障	<input type="checkbox"/>
刚开始使用，还不是很熟悉	<input type="checkbox"/>
不熟悉，经常需要技术人员帮助	<input type="checkbox"/>
要重新学习操作，很繁琐，不实用	<input type="checkbox"/>

15、上课过程中如果出现机器故障或是网络（包括校园网）故障，通常如何处理？

适当调整教学内容，脱离机器或网络进行授课 ☐

经常自己就可以处理一些简单的机器故障或网络（包括校园网）故障 ☐

请同事帮忙处理 ☐ 请学生帮忙处理 ☐

及时请技术人员协助处理 ☐ 其他:

16、学校信息管理技术人员是否能按照您的要求提供软件或硬件方面的服务？

他们能提供大多数我需要的软（硬）件 ☐

他们提供的软（硬）件和我需要的有些脱节 ☐

17、学校信息管理技术人员是否支持您的教学工作？

他们非常合作 ☐

他们不太支持大学英语听力教学 ☐

其他评价： _____

18、多媒体教学方式是否方便了您的教学？

是，极大的方便了 ☐ 多媒体确实有助于教学 ☐

多媒体的优越性不是很明显 ☐ 多媒体教学反而可能分散学生的学习重点 ☐

19、以您的听力教学为例，大学英语教学改革是否提高了教学质量？

学生的听力能力确实有所提高 ☐

学生的听力能力提高程度和改革前差不多 ☐

原来的听力教学设备虽然简单，但是效果却比现在的多媒体要好 ☐

20、大学英语四、六级考试改革对您的课堂教学重点影响大吗？

很大地影响了教学重点 ☐ 有影响，但影响不大 ☐

不是很有影响 ☐ 没有影响，可以按照以前的方法教学 ☐

21、大学英语四、六级考试是否是大学英语教学的指挥棒？

是 ☐ 否 ☐

22、大学英语四、六级考试能较好地检验学生的英语能力吗？

可以最好地检验学生的英语能力 ☐

是检验学生英语能力的一个很有效的方法 ☐

四、六级考试无法真实地反映学生的英语能力 ☐

23、在以下一些听力技能中，请根据您所认为的重要性排序，（1 为最重要，6 为最次要）请将排序后的顺序号写在其后的（ ）内：

预测（predicting）（ ）

抓住全文主旨（focusing on the key ideas）（ ）

推论（inferring）（ ）

词汇量（vocabulary）（ ）

语法能力（grammatical capability）（ ）

文化背景知识（culture background）（ ）

其他您认为非常重要的能力： _____（ ）

24、英语教师在大学英语听力教学中的地位如何？

教授英语听力技巧 ☐ 辅助学生的英语精读学习 ☐

介绍英语文化背景 ☐ 为学生提供英语听力练习的途径 ☐

开拓学生英语听力能力提高的思路 ☐ 引导学生循序渐进地练习英语听力 ☐

督促学生练习英语听力 ☐ 检查学生英语听力能力提高的程度 ☐

其他： _____

25、您所教学生的自主学习能力如何？

大多数学生能自主学习 ☐ 尚可 ☐
大多数学生的自主学习能力不够 ☐ 很差 ☐

26、根据您的总结，学生是否能自觉地在课后寻找机会利用校园网络资源提高英语听力？

大多数学生会自觉利用 ☐
大多数学生会利用，但是主要为了完成老师布置的任务 ☐
大多数学生都没有自觉充分利用 ☐

27、您是否有自己的网站或网页可以与学生分享？

有，且经常更新 ☐ 有，偶尔用之 ☐
曾经用过，但是效果不理想 ☐ 没有 ☐
希望能有，但是不会操作 ☐

28、您是否把作业布置在网上？

是，每次都是网上作业 ☐
是，经常 ☐
偶尔布置在网上 ☐
从来不布置在网上 ☐

29、您是否通过网络和学生保持联系？

总是 ☐ 经常 ☐ 很少 ☐ 从来不用网络联系 ☐

30、您认为学生通过网络主要完成哪些事？

学习 ☐ 上网查阅学习资料 ☐
游戏 ☐ 聊天 ☐
看电影 ☐ 查阅学习以外的生活资料 ☐
其他： _____

31、您认为那种方式更适合我校学生的听力水平提高？（可选 1 至 3 项）

反复听教材的磁带或 CD ☐ 听英语新闻 ☐
看英语电影 ☐ 中国教师上英语课 ☐
外教上课 ☐ 人机互动练习 ☐
四六级试题 ☐ 与母语为英语的外籍人士对话 ☐
找机会和中国的英语老师对话 ☐ 其他： _____

32、对于我校的学生，听力的难度最主要体现在哪些方面？

缺少语言环境 ☐ 缺少外籍教师 ☐
缺少好的教材 ☐ 缺少学习的兴趣和动力 ☐
英语语法词汇等基础薄弱 ☐ 缺少英语背景知识 ☐
学生课后缺少练习的场所和途径 ☐ 学校对听力单科的重视还不够 ☐
其他： _____

非常感谢您完成问卷！

APPENDIX VII Questionnaire for Teachers in November 2007
(Main Research, English Version)

1. How many years have you been teaching? _____
2. How many years have you been teaching College English in this University? _____
3. What are the major(s) and grades of the students to whom you are teaching Listening Comprehension to: _____

4. The textbook you are currently using is:
New College English, View, Listen and Speak ☐
Experiencing English, Listening and Speaking ☐
New College English, Listening and Speaking ☐
New Horizon College English, Listening and Speaking ☐
Other: _____

5. The versions available for the textbook you are using include:
Hard copy Internet version Multimedia material Electronic reference book
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Other: _____

6. What versions are you using in your teaching?
Hard copy Internet version Multimedia material Electronic reference book
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Other: _____

7. What supplementary materials does the textbook come with?
Supplementary listening materials ☐ Tapes for the textbook ☐
CDs for the textbook ☐ Listening materials via the Internet ☐
Multimedia materials ☐
Other: _____

8. Are the topics in the textbook suitable for your students?
Perfect, most students are interested in the topics ☐
The topics are suitable for some of the students, but not for the students in all fields ☐
Most of the students are not interested in the topics. The topics are thought to be unrealistic for the students ☐
Most of the students are not interested in the topics. The topics are too difficult ☐

To be continued on the reverse →

- The topics are suitable for the purpose of learning; in spite of the fact that the students think they are difficult ☐
- The topics are too easy for university students ☐

9. Which part(s) of the textbook satisfy you the best?

- | | | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Topics | <input type="checkbox"/> | Text | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Visual design | <input type="checkbox"/> | Exercises | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Pedagogical structures | <input type="checkbox"/> | Reference book for teachers | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Electronic reference book | <input type="checkbox"/> | Material via intranet | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Supplementary tapes or CDs | <input type="checkbox"/> | | |

10. Which part(s) of the textbook is (are) the most unsatisfactory?

- | | | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Topics | <input type="checkbox"/> | Text | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Visual design | <input type="checkbox"/> | Exercises | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Pedagogical structures | <input type="checkbox"/> | Reference book for teachers | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Electronic reference book | <input type="checkbox"/> | Material via intranet | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Supplementary tapes or CDs | <input type="checkbox"/> | | |

11. What is (are) the most significant change(s) introduced by the National English Teaching Reform?

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| Textbook | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Brand new 'teaching requirements for College English' instead of the previous 'curriculum' | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Increased use of the Internet | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| More autonomous learning is required | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Less emphasis on grammar | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Increased pressure on the students | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Less pressure on the students | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Increased work load and pressure on the teachers | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Less work load and pressure on the teachers | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| More flexible for the teachers to teach according to the different levels of the students | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| More computers available for the students | <input type="checkbox"/> |

12. Owing to the Reform, numerous teaching materials are based on multi-media version or via the Internet. Prior to your classroom teaching, have you been trained in how to use the teaching facilities?

- | | | |
|---|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Have been trained systematically | <input type="checkbox"/> | Trained in which year:___ |
| Have been trained, but not in details | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Have not been trained | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| There is no need to be trained because of the familiarity with all the facilities | <input type="checkbox"/> | |

13. Are the facilities provided by the University sufficient for your teaching?

Very	Almost	Not	Lack of those I need
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

14. Are you confident in handling computers and the Internet while teaching?

- Fully confident ☐
- Familiar, confident in handling normal teaching ☐
- Not good at, but capable of handling while teaching ☐
- Have encountered some trouble while teaching ☐
- Not familiar, just start the multi-media teaching ☐
- Not familiar, and often need support from the IT staff ☐
- Everything is new and not easy to learn and to handle ☐

15. What do you usually do when there are troubles on the machines or the Net?

- Adjust the teaching plan and teach without the machines or the Net ☐
- Have solved most of the troubles by myself ☐
- Ask for support from the IT staff ☐
- Ask for support from the colleagues available ☐
- Ask for help from the students ☐

16. Has the IT staff provided software / hardware according to your teaching requirements?

- They have given me most of the software / hardware that I asked for ☐
- They have not always given me the software / hardware that I asked for ☐

17. Does the IT staff support your teaching?

- They are very supportive ☐
- They are not so supportive to the College English teaching ☐
- Other comments on the IT staff: _____

18. Does multi-media facilitate your teaching of Listening Comprehension?

- Yes, it' s very helpful ☐
- Multi-media is helpful to a certain extents ☐
- The advantages of multi-media are not so obvious ☐
- Multi-media might just distract the students from the real focus of learning ☐

To be continued on the reverse →

19. Are the outcomes of the Reform positive as regards Listening Comprehension?

The students' ability of listening & speaking has been enhanced. ☐

The outcomes of teaching and learning are actually similar to those with the previous audio facilities ☐

The previous audio facilities are simpler but still better for teaching Listening Comprehension ☐

20. Has the reform on the CET4 & CET6 had much influence on your classroom teaching?

Yes, the emphasis of teaching has been influenced a lot ☐

The emphasis of teaching has been influenced to certain extent ☐

The influence is minor ☐

My teaching is unchanged ☐

21. Are CET4 & CET6 still leading the classroom teaching of College English?

Yes No

☐ ☐

22. Do CET4 & CET6 provide an appropriate of students' English ability?

They do provide an appropriate measure ☐

They provide an appropriate measure to a certain extent ☐

They do not provide an appropriate measure at all ☐

23. Please order the following factors as to their importance for Listening Comprehension: (please write the numbers for order in the brackets)

Predicting ()

Focusing on the key ideas ()

Inferring ()

Vocabulary ()

Grammatical capability ()

Cultural background ()

Other factors affecting Listening Comprehension: _____ ()

24. What is the role of the teachers in the College English Listening Comprehension?
(Please tick every relevant answer.)

Teaching skills for listening comprehension ☐

Supporting students' English Intensive Reading Course ☐

Introducing cultural background ☐

Offering situations in which students can practise listening comprehension ☐

Offering advice on improving listening comprehension ☐

Guiding the students to improve listening comprehension step by step ☐

- Supervising and urging the students to practise listening comprehension ☐
- Checking on the pace of the students' improvement in listening comprehension ☐
- Helping the students to pass CET examinations ☐

25. Are the students in your class able to learn English autonomously?

- Most of the students are able to learn autonomously ☐
- Generally speaking, yes ☐
- Most of the students cannot not learn autonomously ☐
- Not at all ☐

26. To the best of your knowledge, do your students take advantage of the intranet to improve their listening comprehension?

- Most of the students do ☐
- Most of the students do, though only for the purpose of finishing the assignments ☐
- Most of the students do not ☐

27. Do you have your own website to share with the students?

- Yes, and it is updated frequently ☐
- Yes, but it is not updated frequently ☐
- Used to have, but it was not so successful ☐
- No ☐
- Hope to have, but do not know how to set up ☐

28. Do you set the assignments via the Net?

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Yes, for every class | Yes, often | Sometimes | Never |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

29. Do you get in touch with the students via the Net?

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Always | Often | Seldom | Never |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

30. From your point of view, what do the students mainly do via the Internet?

- | | |
|---|--|
| Learn English <input type="checkbox"/> | Searching for information for their studies <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Play games <input type="checkbox"/> | Chat <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Search for information unrelated to studying <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Other: _____ | |

To be continued on the reverse →

31. Which do you think is best for the students in this University to improve their listening comprehension? (You may choose 1- 3 from the following)

- Listening to the tapes / CDs of the textbook ☐
- Listening to English broadcasts ☐
- Seeing English movies ☐
- Taking lectures given by Chinese teachers ☐
- Taking lectures given by native English teachers ☐
- Interactive practice with the computers ☐
- Doing exercises from CET4 & CET6 ☐
- Having conversation with native English speakers ☐
- Having conversation with Chinese English teachers ☐
- Other: _____

32. For the students in this University, what are the most difficult factors in their listening comprehension?

- Lack of English surroundings ☐
- Lack of native English speakers to be teachers ☐
- Lack of suitable textbooks ☐
- Lack of interest and motivation ☐
- Weak knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary ☐
- Lack of English cultural background ☐
- Lack of practice due to limited approach and environment ☐
- Lack of support from the University on Listening Comprehension ☐

Thank you very much for completing the questionnaire!

APPENDIX VIII Classroom Observation Record (An Example)

T's name: S. Y.		Classroom: 806	Date:21,Nov	No. of Ss: 48	File No.: SY11215
		Observer's location: R10,L1	Time: 13:30to15:10	Major of the Ss: CHINESE LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE 062B	
Time when T enters the classroom:	13:35	Observation before the class: 66 computers. 48 students. Ss could operate on the individual computer. Ss could choose to practise the resources from the Internet, but nobody is using. Ss prefer to be seated on the back rows with some empty ones in the front. T is late because she went to copy some files for the Ss.			
Time when Ss enter the classroom:	13:20				
Progress of the class: Some Ss are late for the class					
Time: 13:35	T introduces some supplementary materials and comments on the Mid-term examination. (During the mid-term exam, there rose some malfunction of the Campus radio channel on which the listening comprehension was broadcasted)				
13:36	T checks Ss' screen and computer function. T mentions that there is some delay of show on Ss' screen.				
13:40	VOA special English: Thanks Giving. There are subtitles on the screen (operated by T). There rose some malfunction on Ss computers. 7 monitors fail to show anything, 2 computers crash down.				
13:44	CET 4 exercises.				
13:46	There rose the interruption from one S's mobile phone, but this S was not at that time in the classroom. Some Ss ask to replay that part.				
13:50	T pauses the programme and explains the text. (no subtitles on screen) There is no interaction between T and Ss. T does ask questions to Ss.				
14:10	T introduces some websites to practise English listening comprehension. (Wangwang, Pute, Dianjin, China Daily)				
14:15	Break time. T plays music with lyric on screen				
14:20	Questionnaires for the students				
14:29	T introduces some useful material for practising Listening Comprehension				
14:31	Continue with the exercises. Explain, check and play				
14:40	The computer accomplishes the task to download English news from the Internet: English news video.				
14:50	Another English news video downloaded from the Internet: China's price crush. There are some on-line 'Dictations' from the participants all over China,				

	they write down their version of understanding the news and submit the 'Homework' on line.
14:52	The download progresses slowly and sometimes just disconnected. T has to reconnect again.
14:53	Compound dictation while waiting for the downloading. T also introduces some skills for dictation.
15:00	Play the news video just downloaded until the end of class
Observation after class: Ss appear to be very tired during the class – in the afternoon.	
Remarks: There were not very much interaction between T and Ss. The whole class was mainly T centred. The websites introduced by T is very helpful.	

APPENDIX IX Some Questions for Student Interview (Bilingual)

1. 学校有计算机让学生用来上校园网吗？

1. Are the computers on campus enough for you to use after class?

2. 在校外上网时曾经查阅过学习方面的资料吗？在校外要付费，一般都是游戏或者电影？

2. You have to pay for the time on the Internet when you are outside the campus. Have you ever paid to get access for the purpose of learning? Have you ever paid for entertainment via the Internet, such as games or chatting?

3. 关于人机互动语音室，去语音室是不是有时间限制？

3. How many free hours do you have in the interactive computer room?

4. 人机互动语音室的效果如何？听说有些打分很不合理。

4. How do you feel while practising in the interactive computer room?

5. 学校是不是正式提过，四级证书和毕业证书挂钩？如果没有这一条，是不是学习的动力又少了一点？其实方便找工作也是很大的原因对吗？

5. Have you been formerly informed that the scores of CET4 are virtually connected with your BA certificate? If not, do you think you will be even less motivated to learn English? Is it true that most students are learning English for the purpose of job hunting?

6. 课本内容还欠缺什么吗？

6. What else do you expect from the text book?

7. 作为大学生，其实自主学习能力很重要，但是 50% 以上的同学都无法把握自己的学习主动性，有几种情况，例如：不知道该学什么；知道该学什么但是真的要行动了却懒得行动；其他？

7. Being a university student, it is very important that you would learn autonomously and actively. But the fact is that more than half students are not confident in their autonomous learning. What are the reasons for the lack of autonomous learning?

8. 中学时候老师都抓得很紧，到了大学后老师基本上只是上课。是不是还是比较适应中学时候的教学方法，因为那样感觉有老师指的方向，学习有个目标。

8. The students are mostly spoon-fed when they are in the middle schools, on the contrary, they are not pushed so much to learn when they continue in the universities. Do you think so? Have you experienced the same? Which do you prefer?

9. 中国老师上课帮助不大吗?

9. Do you think the Chinese teachers are helpful to your English study?

10. 使用过大学英语课程网站吗?

10. Have you ever tried the College English website?

11. 大多数同学认为看英语电影可以提高英语听力，那在播放原版电影时希望带字幕吗？中文字幕？英文字幕？中英文都有？来得及一边看字幕一边听英语并且一边理解电影吗？如果只是看原版片而没有字幕，有兴趣看吗？

11. Most students expect to improve Listening Comprehension by watching English movies. Do you prefer the movies with subtitles? Chinese, English or both? Do you think you are able to simultaneously understand the stories as well as the subtitles? Are you still interested in English movies with no subtitles at all?

12. 大家都希望学校可以免费播放原版电影，哪些时间适合你们看。例如是晚上还是周末？是否愿意放弃自己休息和娱乐的时间来看这些原版电影？

12. When do you prefer to see the English movies for the purpose of learning? Evenings or weekends? Are you willing to give up some leisure time to improve Listening from these movies instead of shopping, games or other entertainment?

13. 可以举些例子吗？在原版电影中曾经学到了哪些方面的内容，或者英语听力方面有哪些是可以通过电影提高的？

13. Which aspects do you expect to learn from the English movies? How do you improve Listening Comprehension with movies?

14. 很大部分同学要求有外教上课，但是从外教的反馈意见来看，他们上课时学生的反映也不是很好。例如：学生不敢发言，只听不说，或者到后来连听都懒得听了。而问卷中 2/3 同学也表示自己没有自信在外教面前开口说英语，且不喜欢像英语角这样的场合。

14. Most students express their aspiration to have an native English teacher. But with the report from the current native teachers, most students are not willing to speak English at all during the class. Some are not confident, some prefer to listen only, gradually, many students even lost interest to listening. What do you expect to obtain from the native

speakers?

15. 一般同学都只预习精读，而几乎没有人预习和复习听力？是没有设备吗？比如磁带，光盘？有没有同学是自己去买些听力练习的材料在课后听的？精读通常预习哪些方面？词汇？是不是因为要听写或者上课要提问？听力复习不重要吗？

15. Why do you only choose to do something to prepare for Intensive Reading instead of any other courses? What have driven you to ignore Listening Comprehension? Is it because of the limited facilities? Or is it because the teachers would test vocabulary during Intensive Reading classroom time?

16. 学校有英语广播吗？时间是不是合适？有没有同学听过其内容是否合适？清晰度如何？

16. Is there English broadcast on campus? Is the time suitable for you? How about the contents?

APPENDIX X Some Questions for Teacher Interview (Bilingual)

1. 教材适合我校的哪一部分学生，例如：A 班或 B 班？因为专业的差异，学生的英语基础差异相当大，教材比较适合哪些专业的学生？

1. Which groups of students is the textbook suitable for? Higher or lower English level? Do their majors matter a lot?

2. 问卷中显示一半以上的教师对教材的电子教案很满意，电子教案是全体统一的吗？有没有按照不同层次的学生进行调整？例如 A 班 B 班不同的进度和重点？

2. Most teachers are satisfied with the electronic reference book, which parts do you adjust to cater for students at different levels? Do all the teachers adopt the same progress and emphasis?

3. 争议较大的是课文，有 6 位教师填了最满意，5 位填了最不满意。平时教研活动时是否注意到对于课文的不同观点？

3. As regards the texts in the textbook, teachers' understanding is not the same. The texts satisfy 6 teachers the best, whilst 5 find the text most unsatisfied. Why are there such gaps? Do you ever discuss the texts during the staff meetings?

4. 不同专业的学生在今后的工作生活中对于英语的需求可能性也不同，那对他们的要求会不会根据专业进行调整？

4. Do you have different requirements for students of different majors?

5. 全校的学生英语参差不齐，在授课要求上以什么来区别对他们的学习成果？

5. The English levels of the students in the University are distinctively different, how do you set the criteria? How do you evaluate?

6. 很多学生反映要外教要原版电影，但是其实真正实施起来效果并不好，怎样找到这个平衡点？

6. Most students hope there will be free English movies on campus, but as I know, the University has already tried. There had aroused many problems, furthermore, the students were not actually enthusiastic as they had expressed. What do you suggest to guide the students?

7. 适合我校学生的听力提高方面，教师和学生的观点有很大不同，学生认为电影和

外教是最好的途径，而教师大多数都赞成教材的磁带或 CD，以及英语新闻，人机互动学习，但是学生对于这几种途径似乎没有兴趣，特别是教材，他们除了上课很少再去听教材。如何让学生体会到教材的用处并充分利用教材。而英语教师大多不看好外教的课，是不是学生的期望值太高了？

7. As regards the best way to improve English Listening Comprehension, there are huge gaps between students and teachers. The students put much more importance on English movies and native English speakers. The teachers argue that the best methods are interactive practice with computers, listening materials of the textbook, and English news. The students seldom listen to the textbook after class, how do you encourage the students to take advantage of the textbooks? What is your opinion on the native English speakers as teachers?

8. 人机对话的机器量确实是有限的，其实是不是也没有必要保证每个学生有机会试用一下？

8. The computers are limited and it is not possible for every student to get access at their convenience. But most teachers think the facilities are adequate for the students. Do you agree that it is not necessary for every student to get to the facilities at any time?

9. 学校是否规定四级成绩和毕业证书挂钩？

9. Whether the score of CET 4 affects the BA certificate?

10. 听力课上拿出一部分时间讲解四六级考试的题目和技巧，其实是一种应试和能力相结合的方式。对于大学英语的学生，是不是应试比能力重要些，可能英语专业的学生能力更重要？

10. Is CET4 still leading the classroom teaching of English, and practically, part of the Listening Comprehension classroom time have been allocated for CET4 exercises. The teachers analyse the CET4 exercises to make the students familiar with the test. Do you think the competence for test is the most important ability for non-English majors? Whereas it is more demanding for English majors to acquire other abilities.

11. 学校投入了哪些设备和资金？例如语音室，电脑设备，人员培训，还有哪些欠缺的？

11. What have the University done to strengthen teaching and learning of English Listening Comprehension?

APPENDIX XI Interview with the Chief Editor of the Textbook

(Bilingual Excerpt)

HL: 因为我们搞一些教材研究的, 给学生的材料一定要有权威性, 要有吸引力, 要新鲜, 就是他要觉得很高兴, 那么这是我们选材的一个原则, 当然还有难易和其他的, 种种需要考虑的因素, 趣味性呢是我们置于首要的。

HL: We are always doing research into the textbooks. I believe that the materials presented for the students should be professional, attractive and up-to-date, which aims to make the students pleasant while learning. This was the most important principle of selecting the material (for the textbook). There were other criteria such as the level of difficultness and other factors though; we attached the utmost importance on the factor of being interesting.

ME: 嗯, 首要是趣味性。

ME: So the materials must be interesting.

HL: 嗯, 那么其他当然还有难易度也会影响, 因为你太难的话,

HL: Yes, we also considered the factors such as whether they were too difficult, because if they were too difficult,...

ME: 对, 太难的话他们不愿意看了。

ME: The students are not willing to read on if they are too difficult.

HL: 所以围绕趣味性, 围绕学术性, 所以我们还是作了大量, 和人家是不一样的, 人家是一册一册编的, 我们是先选材。

HL: So we have done a lot for the purpose of being interesting and professional. We accomplished the textbook a bit different from the others who usually edit one book after another. We collected all the material first.

ME: 选好然后排一下.....

ME: Then edit...

HL: 所有题材都选来之后, 按照话题都选来之后, 我们还要三篇一个话题, 三篇一个话题, 应该来讲我们选材还是很突出。那么第二版呢, 我们把所有的课文都请学生评估的, 按照难易度, 还有趣味性。一些过难的, 我们去掉, 没有趣味的也去掉。所以我们是作了一些调整的, 所以第二版, 我个人来讲呢, 难易度啊, 解决了原来第一版的问题, 尽管人家正面反映还是比较好的, 他是这样, 矮中取长吧, 因为其他教材也并不太理想, 那么相比之下我们这个教材还是, 人家还是比较包涵的。我们也是不断地征求意见, 我们是全国性的, 对教材作评估.....

HL: After we have collected all the materials, we arranged them as per the topics. The layout of the textbook was topic-centred, three articles within one topic.

Three articles were on the same topic. For all the articles in the second edition, we invited the students to evaluate according to the level of difficultness and attractiveness. We deleted some very difficult ones as well as those dull ones. We have amended a lot in the second edition. So, from my point of view, we have solved the problems of difficultness occurred in the first edition. Though there must be some insufficiencies, most feedbacks are positive. They were tolerant of our textbooks; it might be due to lack of fully perfect textbooks. So they thought positively on this series. We have been continuously consulting with the teachers and students. We did national evaluation on the series...

ME: 确实挺好的。

ME: It is positive as I have learned.

HL: 我们作了两次，各个城市的院校，有重点的有非重点的，我带的研究生给他们作的，就做这个课题咯，北方南方，西北，那么中间比如武汉，还有我们沿海。非重点院校多于重点院校，考虑到因为重点院校本来就少。我们做了大规模的调查，那么这个呢是提纲挈领式的，因为你叫外面的人给你做这么多。那么我们校内呢，把第一版的所有课文，所有练习都是一个一个打勾的，所有的学生，所有的老师。

HL: We have done twice, the evaluation. The universities and colleges, both key ones and non-key ones, the north part, the south part, the southwest, the middle part of china, and the coastland where we are located. We did more research on non-key universities than the key ones because there are more non-key universities nation widely. My MA students and PHD students did the large scale research. The nation wide research was more brief whilst the one we did in our own university was much more complex and more detailed. We took all the texts from the first edition and asked the teachers as well as the students to tick. They ticked each text and each exercise.

APPENDIX XII Group Interview with Students (Bilingual Excerpt)

ME: 精读课你们经常在做四级题目是吗?

ME: Do you do CET exercises now during class hours?

S8: 现在很多就是四级的听力。

S8: Now we mainly practise CET listening comprehension.

ME: 听力对你来说难吗?

ME: Is listening difficult for you?

S7: 有时候做的难, 有时候又做得很好。

S7: Sometimes difficult, yet sometimes I do very well.

ME: 那我想问一下, 这套教材里面配给你的, 除了书, 有没有可能拿到磁带, 或者 CD ROM?

ME: Then, what else do you get as the textbook package? Do you have tapes or CD ROM, besides books?

S8: 教材的话, 没听过, 有是有光盘的.....

S8: Textbook package? Oh... I do not know. Maybe CD ROM...

S9: 根本就不用起来的。

S9: We cannot use them at all.

ME: 用不起来?

ME: You cannot use them at all?

S8: 谁会一台电脑摆在面前, 拿来去学英语, 感觉就很少。大一么, 不能带电脑, 一个光盘的话, 放进去, 还要安装。

S8: Who would use the computer to learn English? I do not think there are many (students using computer for learning English). CD ROM... needs to be installed before being put into use.

ME: 他有没有磁带? 就是说, 你想借的话, 学校里有没有可能借到磁带?

ME: Tape? Are tapes available for you to borrow from the university if you require?

S7: 没的。

S7: No.

ME: 这是一个大问题。然后复习也就不复习了吗?

ME: This is a problem. That is to say, you do not do follow-up exercises, don't you?

S9: 很少。

S9: Seldom.

ME: 离开了听力教室就和听力再见了吧?

ME: Say 'good-bye' to *listening* when walking out of the classroom, don't you?

S8: 现在四级还算好一点, 我听力很差的, 下的 mp3 听。无聊的时候就拿来听

S8: It is better now with the pressure of CET. My listening comprehension is poor, so I downloaded some listening materials to my mp3 and listen to them sometimes.

ME: 这个办法也对。另外一个呢, 问卷里学生提到有外教上课, 很多同学要求有外教上课, 但是矛盾在哪里哦, 问卷里同样有这样一句话, 如果真正碰到外教, 比如说英语角里碰到外教, 他们自己都说了, '我觉得我不行的。'

ME: Good idea. Another topic about native English teachers. Many students ask to have native English teachers in questionnaires, but they also admitted that they were not at all confident of speaking when they were with some native English speakers in English Corner.

S8: 不敢去交流.....

S8: They were not confident of communicating (with native English speakers)...

ME: 这也是你们的矛盾, 对吧? 心理很想有外教来, 但是你想从外教那里能得到什么?

ME: It is really contradictory, isn't it? You would like to have native English teachers, yet, what do you expect from those teachers?

S7: 自己又不会说.....

S7: We do not speak...

ME: 嗯, 自己又不会说。那么你希望他来干嘛?

ME: En, you do not speak... What do you expect from them then?

S8: 其实应该是往好奇方面吧,

S8: I think that should be due to curiosity.