Teaching English in China’s Shadow Education Settings Where Communicative Competence Is Left Out

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Teaching English in China’s Shadow Education Settings Where Communicative Competence Is Left Out

A Field Project Proposal Presented to
The Faculty of the School of Education
International and Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Second Language

By
Bei Ye
May 2018
Teaching English in China’s Shadow Education Settings Where Communicative Competence Is Left Out

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

in

TEACHING ENGLISH TO SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES

by

Bei Ye

May 2018

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this field project (or thesis) has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

Approved:

___________________
Luz Navarrette García
Instructor/Chairperson

May 15, 2018

Date
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter I – Introduction</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Project</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Project</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter II – Review of the Literature</strong></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Characteristics of English Shadow Education</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demand Patterns for English Shadow Education</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ Role in English Shadow Education</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementing The Communicative Approach in China</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter III – The Project and Its Development</strong></td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brief Description of the Project</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of the Project</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Project</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter IV – Conclusions and Recommendations</strong></td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendixes</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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ABSTRACT

English shadow education, whose curriculum in the shadow mimics the curriculum inside the school (Zhang, 2014) has become increasingly prevalent in China. The fact that English shadow education simply serves for dealing with examination without developing learner autonomy and communicative competence is a problem that needs to be solved. However, the huge demand for shadow education is derived from deep-rooted traditional values and the current education system. Also, many contextual realities such as high student-teacher ratio, overloaded curriculum, and teachers’ limited English language proficiency (Nunan, 2003; Yu, 2001; Zhang & Watkins, 2007) stop teachers applying the Communicative Approach and should be acknowledged.

Therefore, two problems that are addressed in the project are the contextual realities in China that confine the application of the Communicative Approach, and how TESOL practitioners can adapt the Communicative Approach with the consideration of China’s local needs. The purpose of the project is to create a handbook to help TESOL practitioners better understand English shadow education in China and remind them to be mindful of conducting any teaching approach before understanding local sociocultural context.

Key words: English shadow education, the Communicative Approach, the Grammar Translation Method, China education system
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Since I began studying in the TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) MA program at University of San Francisco in 2017, I have learned some western dominant approaches to TESOL, such as the Communicative Approach (see Definition of Terms). However, resonating with my learning experience in China, I wonder how the Communicative Approach would benefit Chinese students under the high pressure of examinations and the tradition of the Grammar Translation Method (see Definition of Terms).

Few scholars and policymakers have analyzed the problem of teaching English in China or adapted western pedagogies such as the Communicative Approach while considering of the differences in social, cultural, and economic contexts (Guo & Beckett, 2007). Simply attempting to learn from western education values and meet the challenges of global competition, China’s Ministry of Education has advocated transformation from exam-oriented to quality-oriented education, and also from the Grammar Translation Method to the Communicative Approach (Yan, 2015; Yu, 2001). However, the Communicative Approach turns out not to be welcomed by students and in-service teachers in China (Rao, 2002) since it’s not congruent with the current examination system.

While mainstream schools have tried to shift the focus from exam preparation to the quality of English teaching, shadow education (see explanation below and in the Definition of Terms) has become more prevalent because it is founded on the Grammar Translation Method which meets both students’ and teachers’ needs in improving test scores and teaching performance.
Private supplementary tutoring is widely known as shadow education (e.g., Bray, 1999, 2009; Buchmann, Condron, & Roscigno, 2010; Stevenson & Baker, 1992) because the curriculum in the “shadow” mimics the curriculum inside the school (Zhang, 2014). It exists for reinforcing memorization, exercising mechanically, predicting examination scope, and providing shortcuts and examination skills. In short, shadow education repeats what has been covered in mainstream schools, aiming at improving students’ test scores rather than English proficiency.

Shadow education has expanded significantly, not only in deep-rooted examination-oriented Asian settings like China, but also in Western contexts as they increasingly focus on high-stakes assessments (Frick, 2013). In China’s context, the English language, as a compulsory course in primary and secondary schools, is one of the most common subjects offered by tutorial institutes and mainstream teachers (Yung, 2014). However, most English tutoring in China uses mass-lecturing formats which adopt a top-down, Grammar Translation Method and are all tutored by NNESTs (Non-native English Speakers in TESOL) (Yung, 2014), since they are more familiar with the Chinese examination system, easier to communicate with, and tend to explain grammar rules more explicitly. Thus, students learn by cramming with short-cuts and examination skills, and analyzing past examination papers to look for trends and patterns in them, and memorizing patterns and useful phrases rather than improving their English proficiency as a communicative tool. Therefore, a gap has emerged between the concept of the Communicative Approach advocated by the Chinese Ministry of Education and teachers’ practices in shadow education (Yung, 2014).

The problem that English shadow education simply serves for dealing with examinations without improving students’ English proficiency is inseparable from the Chinese historical values of education and current education system. One dilemma that TESOL educators
encounter is the desire to lower students’ anxiety around examinations, and to teach them something they can use in daily communication. Thus, this situation should be acknowledged in advance by TESOL practitioners who intend to dedicate themselves to English education in China.

Therefore, the two problems that this project seeks to address include: the contextual realities in China that confine the promotion of the Communicative Approach in shadow education, and how TESOL practitioners can adapt the Communicative Approach with the consideration of China’s local needs.

**Purpose of the Project**

In order to introduce contextual constraints in China’s English shadow education setting, I have created a handbook for TESOL practitioners who are interested in working in China. The handbook articulates the characteristics of English shadow education in China and the demand patterns for English shadow education (Yung, 2014). Above all, the problem of overemphasis on examination competence and neglect of communicative ability is elaborated in the handbook (Trent, 2015). Thus, the project will help TESOL practitioners better understand English shadow education in China.

Furthermore, it’s necessary to understand the specific sociocultural context before advocating any teaching approach. Given the problem that English shadow education focuses on examination skills and grammar translation, for TESOL practitioners, the approaches they have learned in TESOL programs or applied in western countries may not be welcome in this setting. It is important to understand China’s sociocultural context in order to vernacularize the
Communicative Approach and optimize it for Chinese students to improve their English proficiency. Also, because of the social and economic constraints in different regions in China, many teachers in China are either unwilling or unable to implement the Communicative Approach in its real sense (Hu, 2003; Yu, 2001). Acknowledging that the Communicative Approach neglects culture differences and local needs (Guo & Beckett, 2007), TESOL practitioners should start to rethink whether the Communicative Approach works under the high expectation of education results and whether Grammar Translation should be used in some circumstances. The project will help TESOL practitioners view the Communicative Approach more critically for better contextualizing, developing their teaching strategies.

Moreover, most of the training that advocating the Communicative Approach are considered impractical (Li & Baldauf, 2011) by China’s English teachers since they are not congruent with examination system. So this handbook may give them some insight into optimizing their training projects and providing more effective and practical advice and guidance to Chinese teachers while considering local sociocultural constraints.

**Theoretical Framework**

This field project attempts to expose the problem of the Grammar Translation Method widely used in China, simultaneously, to analyze sociocultural factors which constrain the promotion of the Communicative Approach in China’s English shadow education. There are very obvious differences between the two methods in terms of the approach and history of theory. The Grammar Translation Method is a very classic method. In contrast, the Communicative Approach is one of the latest methods. Consequently, it’s important to analyze both methods.

**Communicative Approach**
According to Larsen-Freeman (1986), the most obvious characteristic of the Communicative Approach is the communicative intent throughout the teaching. Thus, students use the target language a great deal through communicative activities (e.g., games, role plays, and problem-solving tasks). Education reform has required teachers to conduct these communicative activities more frequently but it leads to the failure of completing the wider curriculum and conquering various examinations. Consequently, English shadow education where teachers engage the students in the merely mechanical practice of language patterns running against the Communicative Approach serves for the pragmatic need of passing examinations.

Another characteristic of the Communicative Approach is the introduction of authentic materials (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). In the Communicative Approach, it is desirable to give learners the opportunity to develop their communicative skills and understand the language used by native speakers in authentic second language environment. Also, activities in the Communicative Approach are often carried out by students in small groups (Larsen-Freeman, 1986) because the interaction among small numbers of students is more likely to maximize the time for each student to learn to negotiate meaning (Li, 1998). However, the big class sizes, the lack of resource and equipment, the English teachers’ deficiencies in oral English and strategic competence, and the absence of native TESOL teachers altogether hinder the implementation of the Communicative Approach.

Another dimension of Communicative Approach is “its learner-centered and experience-based view of second language teaching” (Richards & Rodgers, 1986, p. 69). Students must be made to feel secure, unthreatened, and non-defensive in a Communicative Approach classroom, so teachers using the Communicative Approach should avoid adopting a teacher-centered,
authoritarian posture (Taylor, 1983). This learner-centered principle challenges deep-rooted
traditional teaching methods which emphasized hierarchy and teachers’ authority so it remains
an ideal theory rather than actual practice in China.

According to Defeng Li (1998), the Communicative Approach is characterized by

1. a focus on communicative functions;

2. a focus on meaningful tasks rather than on language per se (e.g., grammar or vocabulary study);

3. efforts to make tasks and language relevant to a target group of learners through an analysis of genuine, realistic situations;

4. the use of authentic, from-life materials;

5. the use of group activities; and

6. the attempt to create a secure, nonthreatening atmosphere.

**Grammar Translation Method**

Grammar Translation Method originated from the practice of teaching Latin (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). In the early 1500s, students learned Latin for communication, but after the language died out it was studied purely as an academic discipline. When modern languages did begin to appear in school curricula in the 19th century, teachers taught them with the same method as was used for classical Latin and Greek (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Today, the Grammar Translation Method remains dominant in China’s English shadow education settings.
According to Natsir and Sanjaya (2014), the characteristics of Grammar Translation Method are:

1. Students are taught by using the mother tongue. Additionally, Harmer (2007) said that whatever the teachers teach and the students learn about the target language, they reflect the target language to their mother tongue and vice versa (Harmer, 2007).

2. The vocabulary in Grammar Translation Method is memorized by translating it to the native language. This way is used to make the students know the relevant meaning and use in the target language (Brown, 2007).

3. Learners must understand the grammar before producing the sentence of text. In the other word, the students are taught the grammar deductively (e.g., Harmer, 2007; Larsen-Freeman, 2011; Brown, 2007).

On the one hand, the emphasis on memorization of grammar rules and reflection on mother tongue causes the rigid, systematic production of the target language (Natsir & Sanjaya, 2014). On the other hand, the emphasis on reading and writing equips learners with the ability to understand English literature and produce information in the correct grammatical rule, which is just what the majority of Chinese students need since they would not go abroad or have access to genuine English conversations (Lei & Zhong, 2003).

In summary, though the Grammar Translation Method meets the basic need of most of the Chinese students, the teacher-centered style fails to develop students’ autonomy, enthusiasm, and creativity (Natsir & Sanjaya, 2014). Besides, the prevalence of English shadow education where
educators completely leave out communicative competence limits the quality of English education in China.

**Significance of the Project**

Despite the vigorously growing popularity and expansion of English shadow education and its significant impact on education systems around the world, English shadow education is still a “relatively under-researched area” in TESOL (Hamid et al., 2009, p. 303). This observation is supported by Kwo and Bray (2014), who argue that “researchers have been slow to focus on the phenomenon” (p. 403). Yet, it is crucial that researchers and policymakers confront (Bray, 2010) the potential social, economic, and educational implications of shadow education. Much more attention being paid to mainstream English class settings results in the opaqueness of shadow education. As a result, my handbook (which focuses on teaching English in shadow education settings exclusively) will show its impact on English learning for Chinese students. And TESOL practitioners in China, no matter whether serving in mainstream or shadow education need to be aware of the impact of English shadow education.

Shadow education takes different forms in different cultures (Bray, 2010). So it is significant to shed light on English shadow education since it’s an indispensable part of English education in China. In addition, the project provides insights for policymakers and the Ministry of Education, indicating that TESOL teachers will find it hard to reach their goals of improving communicative competence unless the exam system changes. For example, the absence of speaking assessment in the NCEE (National College Entrance Examination) results in a limitation of communicative competence. On the other hand, an overemphasis on the Communicative Approach as the remedy to English education problems in China would
marginalize those who favor pedagogies and learning styles other than the Communicative Approach (Lu & Ares, 2015), and would encourage them to participate in English shadow education instead.

For these reasons, the handbook will draw more attention to China’s English shadow education while helping TESOL practitioners to better understand Chinese sociocultural context of English shadow education and to improve both the quality of English shadow education and the necessary training for its teachers.

Definition of Terms

Shadow Education

According to the literature, private supplementary tutoring is widely called shadow education (e.g., Aslam and Atherton 2012; Bray 1999; Buchmann 2002; Lee et al. 2009). The term shadow is used because much content of private supplementary tutoring imitates that in the schools. If the authorities change the curriculum in the schools, before long it changes in the shadow.

Grammar Translation Method

Grammar Translation Method, sometimes also called the Traditional Method, focuses on the mastery of grammatical rules and students practice those rules by translating sentences (usually context-independent) between the target language and their native languages (Richards & Rodgers 2001).
Communicative Approach

The Communicative Approach is an approach to language teaching that emphasizes interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of the study (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). Language learners practice the target language through interaction with one another and the instructor, study of "authentic texts", and the use of the language in class combined with the use of the language outside of class (Larsen-Freeman, 1986).

One-Child Policy

China’s “One-Child Policy” began in 1979, and it led to the emergence of tens of millions of only children in the late 70s and early 80s of the last century. This is a special population which arose due to the extreme measures taken under the pressure of a rapidly increasing population (Li, 2010).

High Power Distance Index (PDI) Cultures

These are cultures in which the power relations are paternalistic and autocratic, and where there is centralized authority. In other words, there is a wide gap or emotional distance which is perceived to exist among people at different levels of the hierarchy (Hofstede, 1984).

NESTs

Native English Speaking Teachers (Yung, 2014)

NNESTs

Non-native English Speaking Teachers (Yung, 2014)
NCEE

National College Entrance Examinations. NCEE is an extremely high-stakes examination set by the Chinese national authorities to select qualified high school graduates for higher education (Zhang, 2014).
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Shadow education which mimics school systems has expanded significantly in China during the past decade. According to the literature, private supplementary tutoring is widely called shadow education (e.g., Aslam and Atherton 2012; Bray 1999; Buchmann 2002; Lee et al. 2009). The term shadow is used because much content of private supplementary tutoring imitates that in the schools. If the authorities change the curriculum in the schools, before long it changes in the shadow as well. According to Xue and Ding (2009), 73.8% of students in elementary schools, 65.6% of junior middle school students, and 53.5% of senior high school students participated in private tutoring in urban China in 2004. It has become more and more prevalent for high school students to enhance their competitiveness in NCEE (national college entrance examination) in China. The study of Wei Zhang revealed that mainstream teachers are the most popular category of tutors. This has been driven by factors including dramatic economic growth, high-stakes examinations, the traditions of a Confucian culture at the macro-level, and school leadership and family incomes at the micro-level (Zhang, 2014).

From elementary to secondary education, English scores in all kinds of examinations, especially NCEE, are closely linked to students’ futures. Consequently, students and teachers are more likely to put effort into writing and reading practice rather than all-round development in the four language skills (Listening, Speaking, Writing and Reading) because most of the English examination papers were designed to evaluate students’ linguistic usage and literacy knowledge (Lu, Jin, Liu, 2016). Therefore, what many Chinese students have learned is “mute English”, and this phenomenon is reinforced in shadow education for its pragmatic goal of passing examinations.
To improve English teaching quality in China, TESOL practitioners can’t neglect the existence of shadow education. To better understand English shadow education in China, I analyze the characteristics of English shadow education, demand patterns for English shadow education, teachers’ needs and power in shadow education, and how the Communicative Approach has been applied in China.

**The Characteristics of English Shadow Education**

John Trent’s interview (2015) of private supplementary educators and Kevin Wai-ho Yung’s interview (2014) of students who have received English tutoring described the English shadow education in Hong Kong from educators’ and students’ perspectives. The current environment of English shadow education in Hong Kong is similar to mainland China. Thus, I will excerpt some narratives and conclusions from both in-depth interviews to show how English shadow education is conducted in China.

1. Fast-paced

Shadow education educator Thomas felt disillusioned in his teaching.

“This is about quickly doing a past (exam) paper, quickly check answers, give students quick hints about exam techniques... (Trent, 2015, p.122)?”

Similarly, Yung’s interviewee Yan mentioned the quick pace of teaching in shadow education settings.
“[The tutor] told me a lot of things nonstop, kept feeding us a lot of things, speaking so fast that he could talk about writing and do listening and other exercises, very rich in content... In such a lesson... I felt that I had already learned more than what I had learned at school for half a year or one year (Yung, 2014 p.717).”

Consequently, students tend to depend on tutors to spoon-feed them examination skills in a short period of time instead of developing autonomy. They were highly instrumentally motivated, as evidenced by their pragmatic goal of performing well in public examinations and securing a place at university (Yung, 2014).

2. Preference of NNESTs

In Yung’s research, there is only one student whose name is Brad participating in a small-group and tutored by a NEST (Native English Speaking Teachers).

“I believed that a NEST can provide a monolingual environment for me to have more exposure to conversational English. At the beginning, I learned English together with a classmate, through playing card games with the NEST in a natural and relaxing manner. I appreciated the Communicative Approach adopted so that I can train myself to listen to and speak English spontaneously. However, because the public examination was approaching, our parents asked the tutor to train us specifically for the examination. We then learned English through practicing past examination questions, which is less interesting but more useful (Yung, 2014, p. 716).”

Intriguingly, Chinese students would rather learn from NNESTs (Non-native English Speaking Teachers) than NESTs (Native English Speaking Teachers) though NESTs have the
advantage of creating an English-only learning environment. From the students’ perspective, the choice for NNESTs facilitates communication in the classroom, particularly for explaining the meaning of difficult vocabulary and grammar items (Yung, 2014). In addition, the popularity of NNESTs over NESTs as tutors might also be attributed to NNESTs’ better understanding of the sociohistorical contexts, which facilitates their teaching and pedagogical choices relevant to the local settings (Mahboob, 2010).

The limited training on communicative skills leads to fear of speaking and using English in a monolingual environment, and the refusal of authentic English conversation stops students from practicing oral English. It’s a vicious circle that more NESTs should break through and mediate.

3. Examination-oriented Approaches

The learning process in English shadow education mainly focuses on memorizing patterns and useful phrases that you can use in varied writing topics as well as drilling grammar exercise and past examination questions.

Shadow education teacher Thomas felt frustrated that he only improved students as exam takers. However, at the same time, most of the students come to shadow education with the pragmatic goal of performing well in examinations.

“You don’t see a real improvement in them as a student, just as an exam taker...as teachers, ideally, we must be helping students to improve over time but this so-called improvement is just an obsession with exam results. But, as a tutor, I feel disillusioned. Is that all I should care about, fast paced exam results? (Trent, 2015, p.122).”
Sung, a student who received English shadow education in Hong Kong considered shadow education necessary.

“Many people say that English private tutor only teaches you exam skills and you actually do not learn anything useful, but I think, under the Hong Kong education system, passing the exam is very important. I mean if it really helps you, it is not a problem to receive tutoring.... I think it is better than nothing (Yung, 2014, p.720).”

However, a majority of the students receiving English shadow education found it not useful. Yung’s interviewee Hanson mentioned that even if students received good results on public examinations, it could be misleading because they might only know how to score well. He further explained that in English shadow education, students memorized a lot of vocabulary items and sentence structures, but they might not remember them after they finished the examination. This view was also shared by interviewees Yan and Fiona. In addition, other interviewees like Lam mentioned that what they learned in English shadow education was too rigid to be used in daily life.

“I got to know some foreigners in university, and I am not used to talking to them. Maybe the words they are using are not what we have been learning. For example, in English shadow education we learned . . . like, writing business letters ... but I wouldn’t use these while talking to them, and it was difficult at the beginning to communicate with them. They told me that, while talking to them I used formal English, too formal, and they thought I was not using spoken English (Yung, 2015, p.719).”

The selling point of shadow education is providing shortcuts to tackle high-stakes examinations. However, when this nearsighted and superficial teaching style becomes prevalent,
it prevents TESOL practitioners from improving English teaching quality in China. Students may be satisfied with and benefit from learning examination skills exclusively in shadow education for the time being, but they will realize later that it will not improve their English proficiency. Therefore, TESOL educators need to think for the long haul rather than pursuing immediate interests.

**Demand Patterns for English Shadow Education**

Apart from the current problems of English shadow education in China, the sociocultural factors that lead to the need and dependence of shadow education should be acknowledged by TESOL practitioners as well.

**Economic Growth & the One-Child Policy**

China’s dramatic economic growth over the past few decades has given families greater disposable income to invest in various forms of education, including tutoring (Lei & Zhong, 2003; B. F. Shen & Du, 2009). Every family tends to invest more in education ensuring their child won’t be left behind because of family financial problem. As a result, since the 1990s, family education expenditure has increased at an average rate of 29.3 percent every year. It is even faster than the increase of family income, higher than the increases of other consumption expenditure and also higher than the growth of China’s GDP (Li, 2010). Besides, comparing with limited learning resource and unaffordability for education in parents’ generation, they take it for granted that their children are now living without worries, there is no reason not to study hard (by receiving extra tutoring in shadow education) or bring good scores back to prove their successes (Li, 2010).
The “One-Child Policy” (see Definition of Terms) has been adopted in China for over 30 years. It enables parents to put their heart and soul to the only child. In return, for the child, it’s a heavy burden to be academically successful in order to find a good paying job and compensate to the whole family. The high expectation of academic achievement for securing a good job becomes the main motivation for many students. As indicated by a research group focusing on “China's one-child children’s personality development” in their report, a multiple-response survey question showed that 77 percent of the interviewed one-child children claimed that they learn because they need to repay their parents (Li & Li, 2010).

Therefore, various English shadow education has emerged to meet the parents’ will of “buying” a better future for children. Efforts in studying have been regarded as key to academic success, which is closely associated with upward social mobility (Bray & Lykins, 2012). This has led to intense academic competition (Watkins, 2009), which is especially fierce among English language learners. Also, the instrumental philosophy of shadow education meets the need of many students to seek quick success and instant benefits in exams rather than developing communicative competence.

**Cultural Tradition**

Researchers from different subfields of education have also attempted to understand the distinct Confucian influence on classroom policies and practices, as well as the attitudes and orientations of Chinese learners (Clark and Gieve, 2006; Grimshaw, 2007; Jin and Cortazzi, 2006; Watkins and Biggs, 1996).

Confucianism, whose core value is hierarchy, harmony, and diligence, attaches great importance to Chinese cultural traditions and values. In terms of hierarchy, Children are
supposed to show their parents respect and obedience and to be docile at school (Slote & De, 1998). This suggests that students’ demand for shadow education can be readily influenced by their parents and teachers (Zhang, 2014). Then harmony, as the most important element in social relations in China, affects the mutually beneficial relationship between teachers and families when it comes to shadow education. When a student’s parents turn to the teacher for extra tutoring, or when a teacher suggests parents to send their child to shadow education, both tend to maintain harmony by accepting the request or suggestion. Families may find a tutor with the help of social networks, while teachers may use them to channel the students’ demand for tutoring (Zhang, 2014). Moreover, diligence is emphasized not only for students but also teachers, so extra work on study and teaching are highly spoken of. The Confucian emphasis on discipline, hard work, and testing performance (Cheng, 2014) has driven the demand for shadow education.

**Examination System**

In ancient China, success on the imperial examination opened the door to a career as a government official, and the legacy of this system may have influenced the current emphasis on achievement in high-stakes examinations (Carless, 2011; Kwok, 2004; Watkins, 2009).

Today, there is one examination considered most crucial for students: NCEE (national college entrance examinations). NCEE is an extremely high-stakes examination set by the national authorities to select qualified high school graduates for higher education (Zhang, 2014). English, like Chinese and Math, occupies 20% score in the NCEE, so English shadow education is highly demanded in China.

Every year, around nine million students compete with great anxiety in the NCEE, which singularly determines one’s college placement and occupational prospect (Wu, 2016). Currently,
each student only has one chance to take the NCEE when they graduate from senior high schools in twelfth grade unless he/she studies in twelfth grade for one more year to take NCEE next year by improper means.

NCEE constrains education reforms from shortening school hours and reducing homework and classroom examinations because the fewer drills conducted, the more anxiety parents, students, teachers and school leaders would gain due to the high pressure from NCEE. In addition, the new textbooks, which consist of much more content and richer information after English curriculum reform, turn out to be a heavier burden for both students and teachers, because only when they finish everything in the textbooks can they feel safe attending NCEE (Li & Baldauf, 2011). Therefore, NCEE enhances the demand for shadow education. Furthermore, high scores in examinations are the foremost priority of students, parents, teachers, and school principals, because this is seen as the only equitable way to assess their achievement because places in tertiary education are limited (Li & Baldauf, 2011).

Because of the priority and pressure of getting high scores in NCEE and the limited time and resource at schools, students tend to come to English shadow education for better preparation for NCEE.

**Teachers’ Role in English Shadow Education**

**English Education Reform**

The purposes of English courses in the education reform is to stimulate students’ interest in learning, transfer the knowledge into practice, and enhance students’ creativity (Lu & Liu, 2016). According to Lu (2014), although implementing a student-centered teaching method is
required in the current curriculum reform, particularly in the English subject reform, the teachers and students still faced significant challenges influenced by China’s examination-oriented evaluation system. Chow (1995) claims that Chinese students prefer to be taught by using traditional teaching methods, such as lectures, handouts, and displays. This is supported by Rodrigues (2004), whose research indicates that Chinese learners have a preference in learning passively. I partly agree with these conclusions, though not every Chinese student prefers to learn passively, in general, they are used to top-down impartation because of Chinese high PDI (power distance index) culture (See definition on chapter 2) and Confucian tradition values. Consequently, shadow education takes the traditional format differing from education reform. Out of anxiety of high-stakes examinations and programed passive learning system, students tend to participate in shadow education spontaneously or reluctantly.

For mainstream school teachers, it’s contradictory to be expected to give students more assignments for better test scores and to stimulate students’ interest and creativity by the Communicative Approach. Chinese parents also believe that overwhelming assignments after schools must be beneficial for their children (Lu & Liu, 2016). Because students’ top priority is finishing homework, non-written assignments like role-plays or other oral tasks for them to learn actively would often be ignored since their time is occupied by other homework. Changing the curriculum to a more communicative one does not provide a solution to effective language teaching problems (Li & Baldauf, 2011). Therefore, to satisfy the needs of students and meet the requirement of education reform, mainstream teachers usually urge students who need help to receive shadow education from them or other teachers.

Also, education reform required teachers to pay attention to the individual’s learning style in order to support the students with adaptable learning strategies; however, in reality, teachers and
students are only offered 45 minutes in the English class every day. Besides, there are about 100
students in two classes sharing one English teacher. Therefore, they would like to conduct
private English tutoring or small class tutoring which is more feasible to pay attention to
individuals’ needs. When engaging in shadow education, mainstream teachers would earn extra
income as well as better treatment and higher reputation since their teaching performance is
assessed by their students’ scores.

**Mainstream Teachers’ Needs & Power**

A considerable proportion of students are tutored by in-service teachers (H. Shen, 2008;
provision of private tutoring is a common practice, people may not consider it wrong. Patterns
are influenced by the high respect for school teachers and their monopoly of power over their
students (Zhang, 2014).

First of all, mainstream teachers tend to participate in shadow education because of
competitive pressure. Lu & Liu interviewed a secondary teacher Mrs. Li in 2006 (p.41) and she
narrated, “Say, a grade has 10 classes with over 600 students. Not only does the student need to
be competitive in monthly examinations but each English teacher needs to be ranked based on
the monthly examination result. In June, all of us need to be evaluated by students’ performances
based on their College Entrance Examination report.” The pressure from the school principal and
colleagues drive mainstream teachers to participate in shadow education. Also, the high ratio of
student-teacher and overloaded curriculum affect teaching quality in the mainstream school
setting since teachers don’t have extra time to evaluate students’ learning process and adjust
teaching styles for individuals. The low quality of schooling can push families to resort to
tutoring (Zhang, 2014). In addition, a new salary system was implemented in 2009 for improving teachers’ income and promoting teacher performance. Merit pay for teachers is a salient component of the salary scheme, which comprises basic wages, seniority pay, performance-based bonus and allowances (e.g., class teacher allowance) (Zhang, 2014). So teachers may encourage their students to receive their tutoring, which can help them generate extra income and improve their teaching performance leading to merit pay (Zhang, 2014).

However, because of in social inequality, evasion of salary taxes and distraction of day-time jobs, mainstream teachers are discouraged from conducting shadow education. According to official school circulars and memoranda statements, daytime teachers are prohibited from providing paid tutoring services to their daytime students beyond school hours (known as ‘you chang jia jiao’ in Chinese) (Kwok, 2010). The teachers’ ability to force the demand for tutoring on their own students stems from their monopoly of power over the students’ learning, and the discretion they have over student assessment (Zhang, 2014) needs to be monitored.

**Implementing The Communicative Approach in China**

Teacher-centered and examination-oriented teaching style in English shadow education has many drawbacks. However, taking the Communicative Approach, as a much-desired remedy to solve the problem in English teaching practices in China is not efficacious in local contexts (Lu & Ares, 2015).

Inevitably, the global spread of English faces dilemmas and complexities. On one hand, there is the need for adaptation and localization of English in non-English speaking countries; on the other hand, there is the resistance to change from native English speakers who insist on their authority over the local language (Lo Bianco, 2003; Sharifian, 2009). Lu and Ares argued that
the strong belief in implementing the Communicative Approach reflects the fact that this approach is looked to as the cure for the problems in English teaching in China because of its symbolic power rather than its effectiveness in real practice. Though the requirement of English subject involves the intervention of Western ideology, and many students in rural areas may not need to communicate in English in their whole life, the effectiveness of learning a language has something to do with proficiency. It is upsetting when students learn a language for 12 years then they realize they can’t communicate in an authentic conversation context. It is the limited improvement in English proficiency that fails to motivate students to learn actively and with the sense of achieving. Additionally, the better pronunciation contributes to memorizing spelling more easily. So the Communicative Approach should be involved in English teaching in China. However, the problem is how to adapt it to Chinese sociocultural context.

There are a few differences between China and western educational pattern that constrains the application of the Communicative Approach in China. China’s instruction is teacher-centered and teaching is very formal. Western education is learner-centered and less formal (Anderson, 1993). Because Chinese students have been used to learn by following teachers’ instructions, once teachers stop guiding the class process they will become anxious and lost. Chinese students tend to consider the “informal discussion” used extensively in western ESL (English as a Second Language) classrooms a waste of time; consider the teachers who let students talk more than themselves unprofessional and not knowledgeable. Teaching materials for classes in western schools differ from those used in China as well. For China’s ESL classes, textbooks are full of facts, knowledge, and truth and information is structured and taught directly from textbooks. While in western ESL classes, the teacher facilitates the exploration of the topic through discussion and the textbooks contain facts open to interpretation and ideas and opinions
to be discussed and disputed (Anderson, 1993). Therefore, an open communicative class mode is unfamiliar for Chinese students and teachers. Additionally, western students are encouraged to ask questions whenever they want during the class. However, in China, it is better for students to delay the question until after the class, approaching the teacher on a one-to-one basis. It is referred to as the need to save face and avoid interruption. Also, asking a question is considered an admission of a lack of knowledge. Asking teachers in class may be seen as a deliberate, offensive act challenging teacher’s authority and credibility (Anderson, 1993). The fear of speaking in public and asking questions without a second thought confine China’s students communicative competence.

Many other realistic constraints in implementing the Communicative Approach are found in the Chinese context, such as large class size, inadequate teaching resources, and teachers’ limited English language proficiency (Nunan, 2003; Yu, 2001; Zhang & Watkins, 2007). Burnaby and Sun (1989) report that teachers in China found it difficult to use the Communicative Approach. The constraints cited include the context of the wider curriculum, traditional teaching methods, class sizes and schedules, resources and equipment, the low status of teachers who teach communicative rather than analytical skills, and English teachers’ deficiencies in oral English and sociolinguistic and strategic competence. Anderson’s (1993) study of the Communicative Approach in China reported such obstacles as a lack of properly trained teachers, a lack of appropriate texts and materials, students’ not being accustomed to the Communicative Approach, and difficulties in evaluating students taught via the approach. Based on a study that assessed the attitudes of Hong Kong educators toward using the Communicative Approach in the local context, Chau and Chung (1987) report that teachers used the Communicative Approach only sparingly because it required too much preparation time.
Thus, it’s English shadow education that could provide one-to-one or small class size for conducting the Communicative Approach. Given the more private environment of teaching in shadow education settings, educators should create the variety in curriculum to attempt to meet different objectives of teaching English. Not only should the instant need of tackling examinations be met, but also communicative competence and learner autonomy for the long run. Also, more TESOL practitioners should dedicate themselves to shadow education as teachers, scholars or trainers to improve the quality of English teaching.

Summary

To help TESOL practitioners better understand China’s English shadow education, I demonstrate the characteristics of English shadow education in the first theme. It is fast-paced, lack of NESTs (Native English Speaking Teachers), and examination-oriented and communicative competence is left out in the setting.

Secondly, the demand pattern for English shadow education in China is analyzed in the second theme. Parents are more likely to choose shadow education due to the One-Child Policy and rapid economic growth which makes most of the family attach more importance to academic success of the only child and economically capable to invest more on shadow education. For students, the cultural tradition of Confucianism, which emphasizes testing performance, and overwhelming pressure from NCEE have forced them to comply with the reality that examination skills are more useful and important than English proficiency. Therefore, shadow education meets their demand of improving exam scores in the shortest time.

Apart from parents and students, teachers’ perspective of shadow education in the third theme is constructive for TESOL practitioners too. Firstly, English education reform encourages mainstream teachers to implement the Communicative Approach but the examination system
remains unchanged. Therefore, to satisfy both the needs of students and the Ministry of Education, mainstream teachers usually urge students who need help to receive shadow education from them or other teachers. Besides, competitive pressure among colleagues, overloaded curriculum, and new salary system leads to teachers’ needs of shadow education. So the teachers’ ability to force the demand for tutoring on their own students stems from their monopoly of power over the students’ learning, and the discretion they have over student assessment (Zhang, 2014) needs to be mediated.

In the fourth theme, the fact that the Communicative Approach is regarded to the cure for the problems in China’s English teaching because of its symbolic power is pointed out (Lu & Ares, 2015). Also, the realistic difficulties for mainstream schools to implement the Communicative Approach are listed as large class size, inadequate teaching resources, and teachers’ limited English language proficiency (Nunan, 2003; Yu, 2001; Zhang & Watkins, 2007).

In fact, shadow education has the potential to create a more communicative environment than mainstream schools rather than mimicking their curriculum. However, most of the literature either support carrying out the Communicative Approach in China or are against the Communicative Approach as a western ideology intervention. The limitation for previous literature is the lack of intersectionality of two teaching approaches and methodology for conducting the Communicative Approach in China’s shadow education. In my opinion, the Communicative Approach works in linguistic way, while the Grammar Translation Method works in cultural way. The vernacularization of the Communicative Approach as well as the appropriate addition of the Grammar Translation Method should be integrated in China’s English shadow education in order to solve both problems that communicative competence is left out in
the setting and the Communicative Approach is not congruent with the China’s educational system.
CHAPTER III
THE PROJECT AND ITS DEVELOPMENT

Brief Description of the Project

My project is a handbook for TESOL practitioners and scholars who are interested in China’s English education to better understand English shadow education.

There are four units in the handbook. In the first unit What Is Shadow Education, by excerpting materials and narratives from students participating in shadow education, the handbook exposes the problem of English shadow education in China. It’s a chance for TESOL practitioners and scholars to have an idea of shadow education settings and prepare before they start their teaching careers or research in China. They will be more aware of the characteristics of out-of-class educational institutions in China and its educational pattern.

In the second unit Why is Shadow Education Needed in China, by learning Chinese sociocultural context TESOL professionals will understand the demand pattern for shadow education and the varied roles that teachers and parents and students play in English shadow education. They will understand what their students need from shadow education and why shadow education is indispensable.

The third unit Which Approach is optimal? will shed the light on Western and Eastern symbolic teaching approaches: the Grammar Translation Method and the Communicative Approach. The difficulties of applying the Communicative Approach and the flaws of the Grammar Translation Method are presented in the unit. It will challenge the idea that the Communicative Approach is progressive and Grammar Translation Method is out-of-date by providing the realistic cultural context and let practitioners look at the Communicative Approach more critically with the cultural lens. It will lead TESOL practitioners to stop and rethink how to
adapt and intersect two approaches in varied contexts to improve the quality of English shadow education.

In the last unit *What Can TESOL Practitioners Do*, recommendations for teachers and teacher trainers and scholars are listed. In addition, some realistic cases and teachers’ struggles are demonstrated and productive solutions and suggestions are attached to each specific situation. Therefore, TESOL practitioners will better understand the explicit sociocultural factors and learn some strategies to improve the quality of China’s English shadow education.

**Development of the Project**

I have learned English in China’s shadow education setting for 14 years; meanwhile, I am learning how to be an English teacher in the United States not only from courses but also from many great professors at the University of San Francisco. The two teaching formats, approaches and values are totally different in these two countries. One is lecture format, and one is discussion and presentation format; one applies the Grammar Translation Method, and one applies the Communicative Approach; one is teacher-centered, and one is student-centered. Personally, I prefer the Communicative Approach though I fully understand why it doesn’t work in China.

Initially, I was eager to solve the problem that shadow education only focuses on examination skills and doesn’t help students with their communicative competence and English proficiency. As a teacher, I want to create a communicative and interesting English class for my students in China instead of burdening them with grammatical drills and examination stress. However, China’s students, parents, schools and even the whole society expect teachers to
provide extra drills and exam skills to improve students’ test scores. I felt frustrated that I couldn’t apply what I had learned in the TESOL program in China’s shadow education settings. Nevertheless, the more literature I read, the more understanding and patience I gained. The teaching approaches and formats can’t change a lot unless the examination system and the education values change. The students’ and teachers’ needs for surviving high-stakes examinations cause the prevalence of shadow education. Hence, it is significant not only to expose the flaws of China’s English shadow education for fixing the problems but also to clarify the realistic constraints and sociocultural contexts for rationality. As a result, the handbook will help western TESOL practitioners to better understand the Chinese educational system, teaching values, and local needs. Furthermore, it will help teachers vernacularize their teaching styles in China with a cultural lens.

I have been working on this project for nearly 6 months; I have analyzed related literature along with conversations with China’s teachers, students, and parents engaged in shadow education to collect more authentic information in my handbook. As the project progressed, I found that many conclusions were contradictory. Some claimed that applying the Communicative Approach will be the remedy for “mute English” by developing Chinese students’ communicative competence and English proficiency, while some asserted that the Communicative Approach is looked to as the cure for the problems in English teaching in China because of its symbolic power rather than its effectiveness in real practice. Some interviewees said they learned nothing in English shadow education, while some interviewees said oral lessons are useless for tackling NCEE (National College Entrance Examination); only shadow education helps. Thus, it became hard for me to come to a conclusion and provide productive recommendations.
However, instead of creating a panacea, I would like to show all my struggles, as well as the dilemma that China confronts in my handbook honestly. I believe there is no perfect solution that can be applied in any circumstances so we need to adapt and intersect various pedagogies in varied contexts. As a result, different perspectives and cases have been included in the handbook, which allows individuals to have their independent minds.

This handbook can be an explicit introduction of China’s shadow education for educators to better understand the context before planning how to teach. I excerpt students’ learning experiences and opinions of English shadow education, provide some authentic materials that shadow education often uses, and demonstrate the demand patterns for shadow education in the handbook. I hope more scholars will be interested in this field after reading my handbook. Shadow education needs more attention and supervision to grow as a mature education alignment.

I would like to distribute my handbook to TESOL programs in several universities in California, on one hand, because many TESOL students are interested in teaching overseas, and China shares the same problem with many Asian countries that include shadow education. It’s better for them to have a full picture of the sociocultural context and localize their teaching approaches before teaching there. On the other hand, even if they will not teach in the field, they can devote themselves to doing more research in this field.

Apart from schools, I would like to put out my handbooks to some teacher training associations. Most of the training that advocates the Communicative Approach is considered not useful or practical at all by Chinese mainstream teachers since they are not congruent with
examination system. So the handbook may give them some insight of optimizing their training projects for TESOL practitioners in China.
The Project

The project in its entirety can be found in the appendix.
CHAPTER IV
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The problems that emerged in China’s English shadow education are fast-paced and absent of authentic language environment yet focused on examination-orientation (Yung, 2014). Consequently, students tend to depend on tutors to spoon-feed them examination skills in a short period of time instead of developing their learning autonomy. In addition, the less authentic English conversation is conducted, the more anxious students feel speaking English. The selling point of shadow education is providing shortcuts and exam skills to tackle high-stakes examinations. However, when this instrumentally motivated learning style is encouraged, it stops students from learning independently, stimulating interest in English, or developing their communicative competence; they will end up becoming expert exam takers.

Nevertheless, there are three main factors that result in the huge demand for shadow education and confine students’ communicative competence and English proficiency. Firstly, the One Child Policy and rapid economic growth enable parents to invest more in the only child’s education (Li, 2010). Thus, various shadow education strategies have emerged to meet the parents’ will of “buying” a better future for children, as well as many children’s needs of seeking quick success to compensate the whole family. Secondly, Confucian core values, hierarchy, harmony, and diligence, attach great importance to Chinese teaching values (Clark and Gieve, 2006; Grimshaw, 2007; Jin and Cortazzi, 2006; Watkins and Biggs, 1996). The lecture format of shadow education, the advocacy of extra work, and students’ compliance with teachers and parents are derived from Chinese traditional culture which is hard to change. Thirdly, the priority and high pressure of getting a satisfying score in NCEE (National College Entrance
Examination), which is a once in a lifetime event, leads to the participation in English shadow education for better test preparation and omission of oral English since it is not in the test scope (Li & Baldauf, 2011).

There is a considerable proportion of in-service teachers participating in shadow education (H. Shen, 2008; Tang, 2009; Y. Zhang, 2013) because of competitive pressure, high student-teacher ratio, overloaded curriculum and salary system. Teachers’ performances are evaluated by students’ performances on NCEE (Lu & Liu, 2016) so shadow education meets teachers’ needs of improving performances, helping individuals and earning merit pay. So the teachers’ ability to force the demand for tutoring on their own students stems from their monopoly of power over the students’ learning, and the discretion they have over student assessment (Zhang, 2014) needs to be mediated.

Also, many other realistic constraints in implementing the Communicative Approach are found in the Chinese context, such as large class size, inadequate teaching resources, and teachers’ limited English language proficiency (Nunan, 2003; Yu, 2001; Zhang & Watkins, 2007). Thus, it’s English shadow education that could provide one-to-one or small class size for conducting the Communicative Approach. Given the more private environment of teaching in shadow education settings, educators should create variety in curriculum to attempt to meet different objectives of teaching English. Not only will the instant need of tackling examinations be met, but also long-term goals of communicative competence and learner autonomy will be achieved. Also, more TESOL practitioners should dedicate themselves to shadow education as teachers, scholars or trainers to improve the quality of English teaching.
Recommendations

The main problems that exist in China’s English shadow education are fast pace, lack of NESTs, and exclusive emphasis on the Grammar Translation Method. In addition, the Communicative Approach cannot have a powerful effect on English shadow education because of the incomprehension and incompetence in applying the Communicative Approach and the resistance of the China’s current educational system.

For teachers

1. Due to competitive pressure among colleagues, high student-teacher ratio (100:1 or so), and overloaded curriculum for tackling NCEE (National College Entrance Examination), teachers tend to be engaged in shadow education, but shouldn’t use their power over students’ assessment to force the demand for tutoring.

2. Apply the Communicative Approach and avoid Grammar Translation to young kids (up to twelve years old) because they are not preparing for high-stakes examinations. Additionally, it will stimulate their interest in English and develop their oral English before puberty.

3. Given the more private environment of teaching in shadow education settings, teachers should create variety in curriculum to attempt to meet different objectives of teaching English. Students who are interested in studying abroad and students who dream of attending Peking University despite poor English grades should receive different help in shadow education.

4. The diversity and positive competitiveness of English shadow education should be generated under effective intervention. Communicative Approach and Grammar Translation Method should benefit different students in different learning styles and needs. More NESTs (native English speaking teachers) should be devoted to China’s English shadow education to
raise the awareness of the importance of communicative competence and provide a more authentic English speaking environment for Chinese students, and at the same time, consider their cultural needs. The intersection of both methods like using correct pronunciation to enhance memorization of spelling is optimal for Chinese students.

5. The teachers’ lack of communicative teaching experience caused them to stick to easier-to-handle teacher-centered approaches. Therefore, they should observe as many communicative classes as they can and determine the teaching mode that fits them and their students. Then, practice! Both teachers and students need time to get used to a new approach. Don’t be afraid of making mistakes, gain experience from each failed attempt. Lastly, give them some tasks like presentations, oral quizzes or role playing activities to motivate students practicing and preparing during the group discussion instead of chatting.

For teacher trainers & scholars

1. The majority of the training methods are considered useless since they are not practical under China’s values or education system. Trainers from other cultural backgrounds should better understand China’s English shadow education rather than asserting the Communicative Approach is the remedy for China.

2. Training and supervision should be carefully conducted in English shadow education to stop educators who teach simply for material gain and instant income from monopolizing the market.

3. Recognize the existence, nature, and implications of shadow education (Bray & Lykins, 2012). TESOL practitioners may also need to consider the complex relationship between
mainstream schools and out-of-class contexts like shadow education regarding such issues as the roles of NESTs and NNESTs, and approaches to teaching and learning English.
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APPENDIX

Handbook: Teaching English in China’s Shadow Education
Teaching English in China’s Shadow Education

(All photos that are describing English shadow education are open source)

Bei Ye
A handbook for TESOL practitioners to better understand and improve China’s English shadow education
# Table of Content

**Introduction** ......................................................................................................................... 3  

**What is Shadow Education?** .................................................................................................. 4  
 Definition ..................................................................................................................................... 4  
 Characteristics ............................................................................................................................ 5  
 Format & Materials ..................................................................................................................... 7  

**Why is Shadow Education Needed in China?** ....................................................................... 12  
 Political and Economic Factors ................................................................................................. 12  
 Cultural Tradition ..................................................................................................................... 12  
 Education System ...................................................................................................................... 13  

**Which Approach is Optimal?** ................................................................................................ 16  
 The Grammar Translation Method ............................................................................................. 16  
 The Communicative Approach ................................................................................................... 17  

**What Can TESOL Practitioners Do?** ..................................................................................... 18  
 Q&A ............................................................................................................................................. 18  
 For teachers ............................................................................................................................... 20  
 For teacher trainers .................................................................................................................... 21  
 For TESOL scholars .................................................................................................................... 21  

**References** ............................................................................................................................ 22
Greetings! I am Bei Ye. As an international student who learned English in China and received TESOL education in the US, I have created a handbook for American TESOL practitioners who are interested working in China to better understand English shadow education as an important part of China’s English education.

I’ve learned many TESOL approaches, such as the Communicative Approach at the University of San Francisco and I am passionate to use them in my teaching career. However, it seems unrealistic to apply them in today’s China, especially in the shadow education settings because China’s education culture is fast-paced and test-oriented. I really want to improve Chinese students’ English proficiency by using the Communicative Approach but I know it will not be welcomed by teachers and students since it is not congruous with examination. Therefore, it is significant to determine which teaching approach is optimal in China and what TESOL can do to solve the problem.

Through the handbook, you will learn the local needs of Chinese students and China’s demand pattern for shadow education. Furthermore, you will be able to adapt your teaching pedagogy to be optimized in the context of shadow education.
What Is Shadow Education?

Definition

Private supplementary tutoring is widely known as shadow education because the curriculum in the “shadow” mimics the curriculum inside the school (Zhang, 2014). It exists for reinforcing memorization, exercising mechanically, predicting examination scope, and providing shortcuts and examination skills. In short, shadow education repeats what has been covered in mainstream schools, aiming at improving students’ test scores rather than English proficiency.

Shadow education has expanded significantly in China during the past decade. According to Xue and Ding (2009), 73.8% of students in elementary schools, 65.6% of junior middle school students, and 53.5% of senior high school students participated in private tutoring in urban China in 2004. It has become more and more prevalent for high school students to enhance their competitiveness in NCEE (national college entrance examination) in China.

(A common scene of China’s English shadow education)
Characteristics

I interviewed Chinese K12 students and students who had graduated to understand their learning experience and feeling about English shadow education and excerpt their narratives in this unit to analyze the characteristics and expose the problems of China’s English shadow education.

1. Fast-paced

“Receiving shadow education is like the psychotherapeutic placebo. The more information being covered, the more confidence I appear to gain to face the high-stakes examinations. But actually, I can’t digest that much in a short period of time.”
(Xiaotong)

“The teacher told me a lot of things nonstop. For example, he taught me how to guess which one is the correct answer in a listening test even before listening to the material, then explained how it works. I would never learn those tricks at school.” (Ru)

In shadow education, students tend to depend on tutors to spoon-feed them examination skills in a short period of time instead of developing autonomy. They were highly instrumentally motivated, as evidenced by their pragmatic goal of performing well in NCEE (National College Entrance Examination) and securing a place at university (Yung, 2014).
2. Preference of NNESTs (Non-native English Speaking Teachers)

““I can’t stand most of the NNESTs’ (Nonnative English Speaking Teachers’) accent but NESTs (Native English Speaking Teachers) only teach speaking, which is not in the examination scope. I am too busy conquering exams to take extra oral classes. I have to sacrifice my desire to improve my speaking for my pre-requisite: passing the examinations” (Ming)

“I am afraid of communicating in English, so I prefer to learn from Chinese teachers. I can ask questions in Chinese without anxiety and understand the teacher’s instructions.” (Tao)

Chinese students would rather learn from NNESTs (Non-native English Speaking Teachers) than NESTs (Native English Speaking Teachers) though NESTs have the advantage of creating an English-only learning environment. From the students’ perspective, the choice for NNESTs facilitates communication in the classroom, particularly for explaining the meaning of difficult vocabulary and grammar items (Yung, 2014). In addition, the popularity of NNESTs over NESTs as tutors might also be attributed to NNESTs’ better understanding of the sociohistorical contexts, which facilitates their teaching and pedagogical choices relevant to the local settings (Mahboob, 2010).

3. Examination-oriented

“I expected my teacher to explain my errors, but he just let me memorize the correct answers.” (Shiying Sun)
The learning process in English shadow education mainly focuses on memorizing patterns and useful phrases that you can use in varied writing topics as well as drilling grammar exercise and past examination questions.

All in all, the selling point of shadow education is providing shortcuts to tackle high-stakes examinations. However, when this nearsighted and superficial teaching style becomes prevalent, it prevents TESOL practitioners from improving English teaching quality in China. Students may be satisfied with and benefit from learning examination skills exclusively in shadow education for the time being, but they will realize later that it will not improve their English proficiency. Therefore, TESOL educators need to think for the long haul rather than pursuing immediate interests.

Format & Materials

The materials used in China’s English shadow education usually are examination papers, writing models, and prep sheets. Usually, in a shadow education class, teachers hand out past or stimulated examination papers in the beginning of the class, then help with individuals’ questions. At the end, teachers comment and evaluate on their work. Sometimes, teachers help students with specific skills like writing by providing writing models and showing students how to use the models in varied contexts or by telling them what kind of sentence patterns and words will let them get a higher score. If one important examination is upcoming, teachers tend to provide prep sheets covering all key points and ask them to memorize them. Here are some authentic materials for 12th graders used in China’s English shadow education. By learning the format

“Many people say that English shadow education only teaches you exam skills and you actually do not learn anything useful, but I think, under the China education system, passing the National College Entrance Examination is the most important thing rather than English communicative competence.” (Yu)
and looking at some materials, you will better understand shadow education. (All the materials are open source.)

● Examination paper

1. Multiple choice (Vocabulary & Grammar)

(There are 20 questions in multiple choice testing students’ vocabulary and grammar)
2. Cloze (Semantics & Pragmatics)

Pass Your Love On

Waiting for the airplane to take off, I was happy to get a seat by myself. Just then, an air hostess approached me and asked, “Would you mind _36_ your seat? A couple would like to sit together.” The only _37_ seat was next to a girl with her arms in casts, a black _38_ blue face, and a sad expression. _39_ I was going to sit there, I thought immediately. But a soft voice spoke, “She needs help.” Finally, I _40_ to move to that seat.

The girl was named Kathy. She _41_ in a car accident and now was on her way for _42_ . When the snack and juice arrived, I did not take me long to _43_ that Kathy would not be able to _44_ herself. I considered _45_ to feed her but hesitated, as it seemed too _46_ to offer a service to a _47_ . But then I realized that Kathy’s need was more _48_ than my discomfort. I offered to help her eat, and _49_ she was uncomfortable about accepting, she _50_ . We became closer and closer in a short period of time. By the end of the five _51_ trip, my heart _52_ , and the _53_ was really better spent than if I had just sat by myself.

I was very glad I had reached _54_ my comfort zone to sit next to Kathy and feed her. Love _55_ flows beyond human borders and removes the fears that keep us _56_ . When we _57_ to serve another, we grow to live in a larger and more rewarding world.

36. A. losing  B. changing  C. taking  D. giving
37. A. comfortable  B. suitable  C. available  D. favorable
38. A. No problem  B. No way  C. Nowhere  D. No doubt
39. A. decided  B. wanted  C. regretted  D. promised
40. A. was  B. would be  C. used to be  D. had been
41. A. treatment  B. travel  C. pleasure  D. business
42. A. know  B. say  C. realize  D. recognize
43. A. eat  B. feed  C. choose  D. support
44. A. offering  B. requiring  C. stopping  D. trying
45. A. impolite  B. far  C. close  D. fast
46. A. girl  B. neighbor  C. passenger  D. stranger
47. A. unusual  B. direct  C. important  D. shameful
48. A. when  B. although  C. since  D. as
49. A. refused  B. wondered  C. cried  D. did
50. A. had warmed  B. had jumped  C. had broken  D. had cheered
51. A. life  B. money  C. time  D. energy
52. A. below  B. through  C. across  D. beyond
53. A. seldom  B. never  C. hardly  D. sometimes
54. A. separate  B. independent  C. silent  D. upset
55. A. happen  B. stretch  C. wait  D. continue

(There are 20 questions in cloze testing students’ semantics and pragmatics)
3. Reading (Comprehension)

Steve knew he’d been adopted as a baby, and when he turned 18, in 2003, he decided he’d try to track down his birth mother. The agency from which he’d been adopted gave him his mother’s name, Tallady. But online searches didn’t turn up any results about it, and Steve had to let it go.

In 2007, though, he searched for the name again online. This time, the search results included a home address near the Lowe’s store where Steve, then 22, worked as a deliveryman. When he mentioned the coincidence to his boss, his boss said, “You mean Tallady, who works here?”

Steve and Tallady, a cashier, had said hello to each other a few times at the store, but they’d never really talked. He hadn’t even known her name. Steve thought there was no possible way she was his mother though they shared the same name. For a few months, Steve avoided Tallady. “I wasn’t sure how to approach her,” he told a local reporter. Finally, the agency volunteered to arrange their reunion.

When Tallady realized that the nice guy she’d been waving at was his son, she sobbed. She’d always hoped to meet her birth son one day. Later that day, mother and son talked for almost three hours at a nearby bar. She’d given him up for adoption in 1985, when she was 23. “I wasn’t ready to be a mother,” she told him. Married with two other children, Tallady says, “I have a complete family now.”

56. Steve gave up the online search for his birth mother in 2003 because _____.
   A. the agency didn’t give him any help
   B. there was no information about his mother
   C. his mother didn’t respond to him online
   D. he missed the information about his mother

57. What did Steve find about his mother online in 2007? _____.
   A. Her home address  B. Her full name  C. Her boss’s name  D. Her new job

58. Why did Steve avoid Tallady for months?
   A. Because she didn’t want to talk to him.
   B. Because he was not fully prepared for the reunion.
   C. Because she was difficult to approach.
   D. Because he didn’t think she was his mother.

59. The best title for the passage is _____.
   A. The love of mother  B. An unexpected meeting
   C. The power of the Internet  D. An unusual reunion

(There are 5 articles and 25 questions in reading testing students’ comprehension)
Writing Model

开篇句

1. When it comes to / Faced with / When asked about
   ...many people believe

That ... but others consider differently regard... as...

2. People's opinions differ. Some believe ..., while others claim...

(Writing models are provided to be used in varied contexts of composition)

Outline for review

Module 2 学会表达时间，用英语预报天气
熟练掌握 what are you going to 动词原形
熟练掌握 be going to 句型中，be 动词的相应变化

1. have a picnic 去野餐，吃野餐
2. What time is it? 几点了?
3. 整点: 小数 o'clock  半点: half past + 数字
4. walk around the lake 沿湖而行
5. Let's 让我们
6. go under the tree 去树下
7. go to the park 去公园
8. go to bed 去睡觉
9. play chess 下象棋
10. look at 看
11. going to rain/snow/windy/... 将要下雨/下雪/刮风
12. at + 点钟 在几点钟

△将来时：
13. be going to = will 计划和将来发生的事 be 形容词

例如：1. When are we going to go eat (动原)?
   我们什么时候去吃东西?
   回答：We are going to eat at half past twelve.
   我们将在十二点半吃。

(Useful phrases, sentences and grammar rules are listed in an outline for students to memorize)
Why Is Shadow Education Needed in China?

Political and Economic Factors

China’s dramatic economic growth over the past few decades has given families greater disposable income to invest in various forms of education. Every family tends to invest more and attach importance to English as a global competitiveness ensuring their child won’t be left behind because of family financial problem.

The "One-Child Policy" has been adopted in China for over 30 years. It enables parents to put their heart and soul to the only child. In return, for the child, it’s a heavy burden to be academically successful in order to find a good paying job and compensate to the whole family.

Therefore, various English shadow education has emerged to meet the parents’ will of “buying” a better future for children.

Cultural Tradition

Confucianism, whose core value is hierarchy, harmony, and diligence, attaches great importance to Chinese cultural traditions and values.

(Confucius)
1. Hierarchy

Children are supposed to show their parents respect and obedience and to be docile at school (Slote & De, 1998). This suggests that students’ demand for shadow education can be readily influenced by their parents and teachers (Zhang, 2014).

2. Harmony

Harmony, as the most important element in social relations in China, affects the mutually beneficial relationship between teachers and families when it comes to shadow education. When a student’s parents turn to the teacher for extra tutoring, or when a teacher suggests parents to send their child to shadow education, both tend to maintain harmony by accepting the request or suggestion.

3. Diligence

Diligence is emphasized not only for students but also teachers, so extra work on study and teaching are highly spoken of.

Education System

1. Education Reform

The education reform has advocated transformation from exam-oriented to quality-oriented education, and also from the Grammar Translation Method to the Communicative Approach (Yan, 2015; Yu, 2001).

However, Chinese students prefer to be taught by using traditional teaching methods, such as lectures, handouts, and displays so they tend to participate in shadow education spontaneously or reluctantly.

Changing the curriculum to a more communicative one does not provide a solution to effective language teaching problems (Li & Baldauf, 2011). Therefore, to satisfy the needs of students and meet the requirement of education reform, mainstream teachers usually urge students who need help to receive shadow education from them or other teachers.

2. Examination System
Today, there is one examination considered most crucial for students: NCEE (national college entrance examinations). NCEE is an extremely high-stakes examination set by the national authorities to select qualified high school graduates for higher education (Zhang, 2014).

NCEE constrains education reforms from shortening school hours and reducing homework and classroom examinations because the fewer drills conducted, the more anxiety parents, students, teachers and school leaders would gain due to the high pressure from NCEE. Because of the priority and pressure of getting high scores in NCEE and the limited time and resource at schools, students tend to come to English shadow education for better preparation for NCEE.
(12th graders are doing English listening in NCEE)

After NCEE

(12th graders throw their homework and textbooks after NCEE)
The Communicative Approach

The Communicative Approach is an approach to language teaching that emphasizes interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of the study (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). Language learners practice the target language through interaction with one another and the instructor, study of "authentic texts", and the use of the language in class combined with the use of the language outside of class (Larsen-Freeman, 1986).

**Characteristics**

1. a focus on communicative functions;

2. a focus on meaningful tasks rather than on language per se (e.g., grammar or vocabulary study);

3. efforts to make tasks and language relevant to a target group of learners through an analysis of genuine, realistic situations;

4. the use of authentic, from-life materials;

5. the use of group activities; and

6. the attempt to create a secure, nonthreatening atmosphere.

**Flaws:**

1. Conducting communicative activities more frequently leads to the failure of completing the wider curriculum and conquering various examinations.
2. The big class sizes, the lack of resource and equipment, the English teachers’ deficiencies in oral English and strategic competence, and the absence of NESTs (Native English Speaking Teachers) altogether hinder the implementation of the Communicative Approach.

3. This learner-centered principle challenges deep-rooted traditional teaching methods which emphasized hierarchy and teachers’ authority so it remains an ideal theory rather than actual practice in China.

**Grammar Translation Method**

Grammar Translation Method, sometimes also called the Traditional Method, focuses on the mastery of grammatical rules and students practice those rules by translating sentences (usually context-independent) between the target language and their native languages (Richards & Rodgers 2001).

**Characteristics**

1. Students are taught by using the mother tongue. Whatever the teachers teach and the students learn about the target language, they reflect the target language to their mother tongue and vice versa.

2. The vocabulary in Grammar Translation Method is memorized by translating it to the native language. This way is used to make the students know the relevant meaning and use in the target language.

3. Learners must understand the grammar before producing the sentence of text. In the other word, the students are taught the grammar deductively.

**Flaws**

1. The emphasis on memorization of grammar rules and reflection on mother tongue causes the rigid, systematic production of the target language.

2. Though the Grammar Translation Method meets the basic need of most of the Chinese students, the teacher-centered style fails to develop students’ autonomy, enthusiasm, and creativity (Natsir & Sanjaya, 2014). Besides, the prevalence of English shadow education where educators completely leave out communicative competence limits the quality of English education in China.
What Can TESOL Practitioners Do?

I have included some teachers’ struggles that I often heard and tried to answer their questions. I hope you can gain some help from it.

Q&A:

1. **Q:** I will lose control of the class if I let the students discuss. They will talk about something irrelevant, even in their mother language. They don’t listen to me and take it as an opportunity to play so it always wastes a lot of time to drag them back. How can I carry out the Communicative Approach and maintain the control of the class?

   **A:** The teachers’ lack of communicative teaching experience caused them to stick to easier-to-handle teacher-centered approaches. They want to use the Communicative Approach, but they don’t know how to carry it out because they only know the theoretical terms. The potential loss of class control was regarded as rather risky (Yan, 2015). Therefore, as a teacher, first, you should observe as many communicative classes as you can and determine the teaching mode that fits you and your students. Then, practice! Remember, both you and your students need time to get used to a new approach. Don’t be afraid of making mistakes, gain experience from each failed attempt. Lastly, give them some tasks like presentations, oral quizzes or role playing activities to motivate them practicing and preparing during the group discussion instead of chatting. Also, if some groups don’t work out well, you should choose the group, making sure that they can help mutually and learn from each other.

2. **Q:** The students just want to improve their scores in a short time. So when I ask them to increase their out-of-class English speaking and listening, they are not willing to do it. They prefer to buy many exercise materials just for tests. How can I change the test-centered environment?
A: A series of systemic factors conspired to extinguish the teachers’ aspiration to use quality-oriented education, including student reluctance, limited classroom resources and facilities, large classes and, most importantly, the lack of school support due to the backlash of the pervasive exam-oriented culture permeating the sector of school education (Yan, 2015). To be honest, as a teacher, you can’t change much unless the education system changes. However, you can combine the test-oriented teaching approach and the Communicative Approach in a small group shadow education setting. For example, you can teach them how to use correct pronunciation to enhance memorization of spelling. Also, rather than convince your students to be exam takers you should pass along the value and idea of the Communicative Approach to the next generation who may make a difference in the future than.

3. **Schools care more about the college admission rate than developing students’ competence. If schools fail to achieve the college admission rate required by the education bureau, their reputation, ranking, income, and student enrolment will all be affected. So school principals have to focus their attention on exam results to keep their jobs. I have to follow the principals’ idea.**

A: First, no one has proved that the application of the Communicative Approach will lead to poor testing performance and low college admission rates. More activists and trainers should convey the understanding of the Communicative Approach to the school principals and teachers. Then, it’s true that the Communicative Approach is not the remedy for China’s English education, especially in rural areas since the students have few chance to go abroad and use English in their real lives. In this setting, you can create English Corner (an English-only communication space), or private oral tutors targeting advanced English learner or young kids to stimulate their interest while focusing on helping them deal with exams to secure a spot in college.

4. **All the training programs advocate student-centered communicative approaches, but ironically the teacher trainers use didactic methods themselves. If they were in our position, how would they teach? They don’t seem to understand our predicaments at all.**
A: The pedagogical training delivered by curriculum developers, textbook writers and teacher educators was generally considered as abstract, theoretical and irrelevant to their daily work with didactic, theory-oriented and de-contextualized regurgitation of academic theories. The ineffectiveness of the training was caused by their unfamiliarity with school contexts and lack of hands-on school experience (Yan, 2015). Therefore, the teacher trainers should be cultural educated and familiar with the education context beforehand. Don’t use the same lecture in varied contexts. And for teachers, discard the dross and select the essence. You should adapt and vernacularize the Communicative Approach critically with the consideration of your own students and teaching field.

Here are some specific recommendations for teachers, teacher trainers, and TESOL scholars:

For teachers

1. Mind your power!

Due to competitive pressure among colleagues, high ratio of student-teacher (100:1 or so), and overloaded curriculum for tackling NCEE (National College Entrance Examination), teachers tend to be engaged in shadow education, but don’t use your power over students’ assessment to force the demand for tutoring.

2. Age Range

Apply the Communicative Approach and avoid Grammar Translation to young kids (up to twelve years old) when they haven’t suffered from high-stakes examinations. And it would stimulate their interest in English and develop their oral English before puberty.

3. Variety in curriculum

Given the more private environment of teaching in shadow education settings, teachers should create the variety in curriculum to attempt to meet different objectives of teaching English. Students who are interested in studying abroad and students who dream to go to Peking university but English grade is not satisfying should receive different help in shadow education.

4. Variety in teaching approach
The diversity and positive competitiveness of English shadow education should be generated under effective intervention. Communicative Approach and Grammar Translation Method should benefit different students in different learning styles and needs. More NESTs (native English speaking teachers) should devote to China’s English shadow education to raise the awareness of the importance of communicative competence and provide more authentic English speaking environment for Chinese students, at the same time, consider their cultural needs.

**For teacher trainers**

1. **Be cultural educated**

   The majority of the trainings are considered useless since they are not practical under China’s value or education system. Trainers from other cultural backgrounds should better understand China’s English shadow education rather than asserting the Communicative Approach is the remedy for China.

2. **Supervision of the whole market**

   Training and supervision should be carefully conducted to English shadow education to stop educators who teach simply for material gain and instant interests from monopolizing the market.

(China’s teachers are receiving training from western educators)

**For TESOL scholars**

Despite the vigorously growing popularity and expansion of English shadow education and its significant impact on education systems around the world, English shadow education is still a “relatively under-researched area” in TESOL (Hamid et al., 2009). Yet, it is crucial that researchers and policymakers confront (Bray, 2010) the potential social, economic, and educational implications of shadow education. Much more attention being paid to mainstream English class settings results in the opaqueness of shadow education.
References


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