

## To what extent is communicative language teaching a feature of IELTS classes in China?

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This study examines the teaching methodology used in IELTS preparation classes in China. It finds that the style adopted by IELTS teaching in China is largely communicative, and classes tend to be teacher-centred with widespread use of L1.

[Click here to read the Introduction to this volume which includes an appraisal of this research, its context and impact.](#)

### ABSTRACT

This report examined the teaching methodology used in IELTS preparation classes in China. The research used Hu's six element framework for describing teaching methods:

- pedagogical orientation
- instructional content and presentation
- language practice activities
- teacher and learner roles
- learning materials
- assessment.

It started with the hypothesis that teachers were making methodological choices between communicative language teaching (CLT), audio-lingualism and grammar translation methods.

Research methods included: questionnaires completed by just under 80 IELTS teachers; stand-alone interviews with 10 teachers; and three stimulated recall interviews following classroom observations. We found that the most common methodology used approximated to CLT but that teachers took a more dominant role and used more Chinese than would be characteristics of CLT.

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## 1 BACKGROUND

The appropriacy of communicative language teaching (CLT) in China and other Confucian societies is a matter that has led to much debate (Yu, 2001; Bax, 2003; Hiep, 2007; Hu, 2005a; Kumaravadivelu, 2006; Takanashi, 2004; Anderson, 1993; Burnaby and Sun, 1989; Jin and Cortazzi, 1998; Liao, 2004; Tang, 1998; Jin and Cortazzi, 1996; Li, 1998). It seems clear that implementing CLT in China, assuming such a thing is desirable, is not a straightforward process.

One of the factors that impacts on language teaching/learning systems is washback from the examination that students have to take (Qi, 2004; Alderson and Hamp-Lyons, 1996; Hayes and Reid, 2004; Rea-Dickins and Scott, 2007; Cheng, 1999; Qi, 2007; Taylor, 2005). IELTS (2008) is designed to measure the “ability to communicate in English across all four language skills – listening, reading, writing and speaking – for people who intend to study or work where English is the language of communication”. As IELTS is a very high-stakes examination, providing access to higher education in Anglophone countries, one might expect that IELTS preparation courses would be strongly influenced by the principles of communicative language teaching (Green, 2007).

This led us to formulate our research question as:

*To what extent is communicative language teaching a feature of IELTS classes in China?*

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews the literature related to language teaching methodology, focusing on communicative language teaching and the notions of backwash or washback, with a view to establishing relevant constructs and a set of research instruments to enable us to address our research aim.

### 2.1 A framework to describe language teaching methods

Communicative language teaching (CLT) is normally presented as one of a range of methods or approaches to language teaching that a teacher can adopt in the classroom (Richards and Rodgers, 2001; Harmer, 2007; Larsen-Freeman, 2000), and so CLT needs to be understood in the context of alternative decisions that teachers can make about what happens in the classroom.

In order to describe the range of options available to teachers, we need a framework for describing methods or approaches. Unfortunately, as our use of the two terms ‘method’ and ‘approach’ suggests, different commentators offer different frameworks for describing methods and approaches.

Harmer, for example, sees approach as the most general term and this is realised in terms of methods, realised in their turn by procedures, which in turn are realised through techniques. In contrast, Richards and Rodgers (2001) use the term method as their super-ordinate, which is then realised at various levels from the most theoretical, approach, through design to the most practical, procedure. See Appendix 1.

The Richards and Rodgers’ framework is the most detailed and initially seemed the most helpful. However, there are some problems with the framework. For example, they see an approach as a part of a method. An approach comprises a theory of language and a theory of language learning. This works best for the audio-lingual method where there are obvious candidates for the theory of language, structural linguistics, and for the theory of learning, behaviourism. However, even here, Castagnaro (2006) has argued that this is a misrepresentation of how audio-lingual methods came into existence.

In terms of the grammar translation method, Howatt (2004 p 151 et seq) indicates that the motivating force behind the method is to be found in the institutional and pedagogic constraints, rather than any question of theories of language and learning. Similarly, for communicative language teaching, there is considerable vagueness about the theories of language and learning that underpin it (Richards and Rodgers, 2001). For our purposes, we find it hard to see approach as a necessary part of method.

We would prefer to use the term method to describe what Richards and Rodgers call ‘design’ so examples of methods would include grammar translation, audio-lingualism and communicative language teaching.

At the level of method (or design in their terminology), Richards and Rodgers identify, six elements:

1. objectives of the method
2. a syllabus model
3. types of learning and teaching activities
4. learner roles
5. teacher roles
6. instructional materials.

Hu (2005b) offers a rather similar framework for describing methods:

- pedagogical orientation
- instructional content and presentation
- language practice activities
- teacher and learner roles
- learning materials
- assessment.

Richards and Rodgers are here providing a way of describing a method in general terms but Hu’s model represents a shift in attention from program and institutional factors towards our area of interest – what happens in the classroom – and so, for present purposes, it seems a more useful framework. We follow Hu in treating objectives and syllabus together under the heading of pedagogic orientation. Similarly, for teachers, the learning and teaching activities are central to a description of the classroom, and so we adopt Hu’s division of these into two groups relating to instructional content and presentation and ways in which language is practiced. We have also grouped learner and teacher roles under one because we see these as essentially complementary. We have not included the heading of assessment in our descriptions of language teaching methodologies because all the teaching was focused on IELTS.

Within a Chinese context, the choice of methods can be seen as being between grammar translation (GT), the audio-lingual method (AL) and CLT (Hu, 2005b p 637). We considered whether task-based learning (TBL) might be seen as an alternative to these methods. However, there is little evidence that task-based learning is a significant methodology in China. Indeed, issues related to the implementation of the “relatively new CLT approach”(Yu, 2001 p 197) and its cultural appropriacy (Hu, 2005a; Liao, 2004; Fang and Warshauer, 2004; Hu, 2005b) seem to dominate the literature. The limited role of TBL in China is supported by the experience of TESOL in China of Yan, one of the researchers.

We now describe how we used this framework to provide a working description of these three methods. These descriptions are informed by Howatt (2004 p 151 et seq), Harmer (2007), Richard and Rodgers (2001) and Larsen-Freeman (2000), but our main source of information here is Hu’s (2005b) questionnaire.

<b>Pedagogical orientation</b>	Focus on students' knowledge about the L2
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	Predominant attention to reading & writing
	Emphasis on formal accuracy
<b>Instructional content and presentation</b>	Explanation of grammar rules
	Illustration of grammar rules
	Explanation of texts sentence by sentence
	Parsing of sentences in texts
	Contrastive analysis of the L1 and L2
	Explicit & direct correction of learner errors
<b>Language practice activities</b>	Grammar exercises
	Translation exercises
<b>Teacher and learner roles</b>	Teacher talk for most of class
	Teacher-fronted instruction
	Teacher control over class
<b>Learning materials</b>	Structure-based textbooks

**Table 1: A description of the grammar translation method**

### 2.1.1 Grammar translation

As Howatt (2004) points out, the term grammar-translation (GT) covers a broad range of teaching practices but the pedagogic orientation of GT classes typically focuses on knowledge about language, rather than the ability to use language. Language is seen as primarily to do with reading and writing and accuracy is given greater weight than fluency. In terms of instructional content and presentation, this means that a lot of time is given up to the explanation and illustration of grammar rules, often by a comparison between the first and second language, through parsing individual sentences or by the explicit correction of learner errors. There is little or no discussion of how texts are organised. Practice activities focus mainly on the construction of sentences and the translation of sentences of texts between the first and second language. The teacher plays the dominant role in the class, speaking for most of the time and in control of most activities. Materials are focused on grammar. This description of GT is summarised in the statements in Table 1.

### 2.1.2 Audio-lingual method

In the audio-lingual method (AL), the pedagogic orientation is towards accuracy in the use of aural and oral skills. Table 2 provides an outline description of AL. In terms of instructional content, the second language is the main language used in conducting the lesson and grammar is taught implicitly or inductively. Errors are corrected immediately and directly. Practice activities centre on the repetition of sentences following a particular pattern, often involving students reading dialogues aloud and then memorising the dialogues, rather than creating their own utterances. While the teacher's roles in AL involve less teacher talk than in GT, the teacher is the source of instruction and controls most of what happens in the class. Learning materials play a key role in lesson planning and tend to be grammar focused with texts written for language teaching purposes preferred over authentic texts (Guariento and Morley, 2001).

<b>Pedagogical orientation</b>	Emphasis on formal accuracy
	Predominant attention to aural & oral skills
<b>Instructional content and presentation</b>	Explicit & direct correction of learner errors
	Use of L2 in conducting a lesson
	Inductive teaching of grammar
<b>Language practice activities</b>	Sentence pattern practice
	Reading-aloud of dialogues & texts
	Memorisation of dialogues & texts
	Prepared language performance
<b>Teacher and learner roles</b>	Teacher-fronted instruction
	Teacher control over class
<b>Learning materials</b>	Structure-based textbooks
	Adherence to prescribed textbooks
	Knowledge about grammar & vocabulary
	Inauthentic texts

**Table 2: A description of the audio-lingual method**

### 2.1.3 Communicative language teaching

The term communicative language teaching is a broad and contested term (Thompson, 1996; Hiep, 2007). Here we are trying to offer a working definition of CLT that can be applied in China and our characterisation is largely based on work carried out in that context (Hu, 2005a; Liao, 2004). The main feature of the pedagogic orientation of a CLT course is students' ability to use the second language (L2), rather than knowledge about language, with a balance between the four skills (see Table 3). With reference to instructional content and presentation, the second language is the language of the classroom and presentations focus on teaching grammar inductively or on communicative functions. Instructional content also often includes elements of the L2 culture with an option of real or open-ended questions. CLT has a wide range of practice activities. These include communication between teacher and students and within student groups in the target language, the use of tasks resembling what happens outside the classroom, and the use of all four skills in the classroom.

<b>Pedagogical orientation</b>	Balanced attention to the four language skills
	Focus on students' ability to use the L2
<b>Instructional content and presentation</b>	Use of the L2 in conducting a lesson
	Inductive teaching of grammar
	Teaching of communicative functions
	Cultures of L2-speaking peoples
	Use of open-ended questions
<b>Language practice</b>	Teacher-student interaction in L2
	Games & activities resembling real-world tasks
	Constant exposure to new language input
	Communication in L2 among students
	Integrated practice in the four language skills
	Reading & writing about various topics
	Listening and speaking about various topics
<b>Teacher and learner roles</b>	Pair & small group work
	Peer feedback & evaluation
<b>Materials</b>	Teacher-developed materials
	Authentic materials
	Ability to use the L2

**Table 3: A description of communicative language teaching**

#### 2.1.4 Backwash/washback

Backwash, or washback (we regard the labels as interchangeable) describes the influence that a test has on the classroom. Alderson and Wall (1993, p 117) say that “the Washback Hypothesis seems to assume that teachers and learners do things they would not necessarily otherwise do because of the test”. Taylor (2005, p 54) offers this interpretation of the term:

*teachers will be influenced by the knowledge that their students are planning to take a certain test and will adapt their teaching methodology and lesson content to reflect the test's demands.*

Alderson and Wall (1993) identify 15 possible backwash hypotheses. The most general of these is that a test will influence teaching and this is very relevant to the current study. They go on to separate the content of teaching from its methodology in the following two hypotheses.

*A test will influence **what** teachers teach.*

*A test will influence **how** teachers teach (Alderson and Wall, 1993 p 120, bold in original).*

This split links to the distinction in the discussion above on language teaching methodology between theories of language (what teachers teach) and theories of learning (related to how teachers teach). The same two authors provided evidence for this separation between content and methodology (Wall and Alderson, 1995) in their study of a Sri Lankan test where they found that the aims of the teaching were changed by the introduction of a new examination, but that the way in which language was taught remained unchanged. However, the distinction is, at the least, complicated for CLT because of the widespread notion that language use is a significant means of language development (eg, Krashen, 1997; Breen, 2001). So when a teacher uses a role-play in class this is both a methodological choice and a manifestation of the teacher's ideas about language. For this reason, our main question remains whether IELTS has an impact on language teaching, though we would hope to explore the possibly differential impact on course content and course methodology in our study.

Backwash is mediated through the institutional and personal context in which teaching occurs. The state examination system in China (keju) has a 1500 year long history as the most important means of recruiting state officials in the large administration system of the Chinese imperial state (Yong'shan, 2009; Yao, 2000). Parents who wished their children to take this examination would be prepared for them to attend appropriate institutions, and so the notion of investment in education leading to an increased range of professional opportunities is widespread. The admission system involved a series of examinations with the number of candidates being reduced at each stage, and in the final stage, candidates had to write an essay composed according to a strict pattern called the eight-legged essay (baguwen), with introduction, exposition, argumentation, and conclusion, both in two sections. The eight-legged essay has come to be seen as an index of pedantry or triteness. While there is argument about whether this pattern has an influence on the way in which Chinese users of English write in English (Kirkpatrick, 1997; Atkinson, 2004; Kubota and Lehner, 2004), the notion of candidates needing skills which are specific to an examination course is commonplace in China, and this might be expected to reinforce the backwash effect of all kinds of examinations on what happens in classrooms.

### 3 DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

We now turn to an examination of data collection instruments used to address our research question.

Alderson and Wall (1993) noted that there was “remarkable little research” on backwash in language education at the time of writing and criticised what work had been done for the lack of reference to what happened in classrooms. They make two proposals about research methods. Firstly “we need to look closely at classroom events” (p 127) and, secondly, “we believe it important in conjunction with classroom observations to triangulate the researcher's perceptions of events with some account from participants of how they perceived and reacted to events in class, as well as outside class” (p 127). Alderson and Wall (1993, p 62) pointed out the complexity of washback and emphasised the importance of a combined method to answer questions such as “why the teachers do what they do, what they understand about the underlying principles of the textbook and examination, and what they believe to be effective means of teaching and learning”. They concluded:

*Observations on their own cannot give a full account of what is happening in classrooms. It was important for us to complement the classroom observations with teacher interviews, questionnaires to teachers and teacher advisers, and analyses of materials (especially tests) teachers had prepared for classes. (Alderson and Wall, 1993, p 63)*

This combination of observation with interview data was adopted in the Sri Lankan study (Wall and Alderson, 1995). Similarly, Qi (2004) used interviews, questionnaires and classroom observations. The influence of a test can be seen as an aspect of teacher cognition (Borg, 2006 and 2005) and so we have chosen to combine observation and interview data using stimulated recall (Wu and Badger, 2009; Schepens et al, 2007; Badger and Yan, 2009).

For the present project, we used five research instruments:

1. questionnaires
2. semi-structured interviews
3. observation schedules
4. field notes of classes
5. stimulated recall interviews.

### **3.3 Data collection**

In this section we discuss the choice of participants.

#### **3.3.1 Participants**

All participants in the study are teachers working on IELTS programs but they can be divided into three groups based on their level of participation in the research. The three levels of participation were:

1. completing a questionnaire
2. being interviewed
3. being observed in a lesson and carrying out a stimulated recall interview related to the lesson.

The first group, of approximately 70 teachers, completed a questionnaire related to their teaching. The questionnaire and the rationale for the questions are detailed below, under the next heading, Research instruments.

The participants were identified through contacts of the IELTS teachers from two training schools, through contacts in Beijing, Chengdu and Chongqing, and through the colleagues of one researcher, Yan. We also contacted any educational institutions whose online publicity indicated that they prepared learners for IELTS. The participants were volunteers. We had initially hoped for 100 participants in this cohort but this proved harder to achieve than expected, and we had to offer an incentive of 20 RMB to teachers who completed the survey. By the end of the project, we had received 69 completed questionnaires. This cohort was the result of an extensive search for IELTS teachers but we do not have a comprehensive database of all IELTS teachers and so cannot report on whether this cohort is representative of IELTS teachers in China.

The second group consisted of 10 teachers from Chinese universities or language schools. These were volunteers from the first group. These teachers were from three different kinds of IELTS training schools in China: New Oriental, Global IELTS Training and Guangdong University of Foreign Studies (GDUFS). New Oriental was founded in 1993 and now has 48 schools and 270 learning centres. It is the largest provider of private education in China. It provides courses for the major exams used by educational institutions in China and abroad. Global IELTS was founded in 1997 in Beijing but now has schools in 55 cities in China. Its main aim is preparing students for international and national language examinations such as IELTS and TOEFL. The International College of GDUFS was founded in 2004. It is one of only four overseas training centres authorised by the Chinese Service Centre of Scholarly Exchange (CSCSE), a legally registered corporate body affiliated to the Ministry of Education (MOE). The International College of GDUFS is the only CSCSE-authorised overseas training centre in South China. Its main aim is preparing students for academic study through English studies, especially IELTS preparation.

We interviewed 10 teachers from these institutions. The participants from New Oriental and Global IELTS Training were teaching in different cities. These teachers received payment.

For the final group of three teachers, one researcher, Yan, observed three lessons for each teacher and carried out stimulated recall interviews with them. The teachers were volunteers from the first group but not a part of the second group. The teachers were teaching in Guangzhou. We paid these teachers for their participation.

### 3.3.2 Research instruments

Here we describe how we used our five research instruments: questionnaires; semi-structured interviews; observation schedules; field notes of classes; and stimulated recall interviews.

The questionnaire was designed to collect information related to the context of teaching and the approach to language teaching. The first part of the questionnaire collected information related to the participants (age, teacher education and teaching experience) and teaching context (size of class, level of students and availability of resources). The second part of the questionnaire was based on the characterisation of CLT, audio-lingualism and grammar translation outlined above and in Hu (2005b). Initial discussions with teachers in Guangzhou led us to make some minor changes which are described in Appendix 2. Items were presented in the form of a Likert scale in which we asked teachers to characterise their practice on IELTS preparation courses. This enabled us to see to what extent teachers believed that they were teaching such courses in a communicative manner. The questionnaire was in English. The questionnaire was made available to participants on paper, electronically and on the web using SurveyMonkey (2008). The questionnaire is included in Appendix 2.

We asked participants to give us their name to enable us to check if any individuals were completing the questionnaire more than once. These data were not retained when we completed this data set and we do not envisage any other ethical issues related to this research instrument.

The semi-structured interview schedule was based on Hu's framework for describing methods:

- pedagogical orientation
- instructional content and presentation
- language practice activities
- teacher and learner roles
- learning materials
- assessment.

We asked teachers to talk about these aspects of their IELTS lessons and we used the statements characterising individual methods in the questionnaire as cues for discussion where appropriate. The interviewees had completed the online questionnaire but we do not think this had a significant impact on the data.

The interviews were carried out by Yan either in English or Chinese. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed and, if the interview had been carried out in Chinese, translated into English. We checked the reliability of the translations by asking a colleague to translate one interview back into Chinese and the resultant text was very similar to the original. Where the original interview was in English, we did not correct any linguistic infelicities. A sample interview is included in Appendix 3. The interviews were intended to confirm or disconfirm the results of the questionnaire but also to enable us to track any other aspects of language teaching that the questionnaire did not capture, such as syllabus design, attitudes to IELTS preparation classes and learner attitudes.

The participants' anonymity was protected as far as possible by anonymising these data in the process of transcription. We did not retain the audio recordings of the interviews after they were transcribed.

We collected field notes of three lessons taught by each of the three teachers who agreed to participate in the stimulated recall interviews. The field notes were informed by Hu's framework. For some lessons, teachers were able to provide us with lesson plans and other teaching materials.

Ethical issues were addressed in a range of ways. See Appendix 5 for details of this. Firstly, we obtained informed oral consent of the students in the classes and anonymised their contributions as far as we could. For the teachers, it was not possible to guarantee confidentiality so we ensured that they understood the risks before they agreed to participate and asked them to sign consent forms. We anonymised the field notes as far as possible.

We also audio-recorded the three observed lessons. The recordings give a general impression of the classes but are most reliable in terms of what the teacher says. We did not transcribe the recordings but used the recordings to clarify issues in the field notes.

Our final research instrument was the stimulated recall interviews. Yan administered these interviews in English to each of the three observed teachers but related to only one lesson (Brown and Rodgers, 2002; Schepens et al, 2007). The interviews were carried out on the same day as the observations to ensure that teachers had a reasonably clear recollection of the events identified. Yan asked teachers to identify and discuss at least one key event in the lesson. He identified what he saw as a key event related to communicative language teaching in the lesson and asked the teachers to talk about the decisions they took and the reasons for these decisions.

The ethical issues with this data set were very similar to those relating to the lesson observations and were addressed in an equivalent manner.

More generally, we have completed a questionnaire related to ethical issues produced by the research office at Leeds. The University of Leeds Ethical committee is happy with the way we have addressed ethical issues.

## **4 DATA ANALYSIS**

The questionnaires were analysed with SPSS using confirmatory factor analysis. Following Hu (2005b), the analysis assumed that there were three factors: grammar translation, audio-lingualism and communicative language teaching.

The interview, observation schedules, field notes of the lessons and stimulated recall interviews were analysed using the framework devised by Hu (2005b), and, when necessary, supplemented by categories derived from the data itself (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Senior, 2006). We also drew on Borg's (2003, 2005) work on teacher cognition in our analysis of the stimulated recall interviews.

We report our analysis in terms of the questionnaire, the interviews and the protocol data.

### **4.1 The questionnaire**

Sixty-nine teachers of IELTS completed the questionnaire. The largest group (24) came from Guangzhou, with 11 from Ningbo and five from Hong Kong (Table 4). Thirty-nine of the teachers had a Bachelor degree, 33 had a Masters degree and five had doctorates. Forty-seven had taken some kind of course related to the teaching of IELTS but the information provided made it hard to relate to specific courses. The amount of experience in terms of teaching and examination experience is detailed in Table 5.

Place	Number of participants
Guangzhou	24
Beijing	8
Ningbo	11
Chengdu	4
Chongqing	3
Hong Kong	6
Others	13

n=69

**Table 4: Geographical distribution of questionnaire participants**

The mean length of the IELTS course was three months and the mode was two months. There was considerable variation with one course lasting for two years and several lasting for less than a month. Table 6 includes the aims that the participants identified for their IELTS programs. Participants identified on average between one and two aims for the IELTS programs with two examination-oriented aims being the most common: passing IELTS (29 times) and familiarisation with IELTS (17). However, more general aims such as speaking/ listening skills (12) and general language ability (11) were also considered important.

	Mean years of experience
Experience as an English teacher	10
Experience in current institution	7
Experience teaching exam classes	6
Experience teaching IELTS classes	4

Figures have been rounded to the nearest year. n=69.

**Table 5: Teaching experience of participants**

Aim	Frequency
Passing IELTS	29
Familiarisation with IELTS	17
Speaking and listening skills	12
General language ability	11
Writing skills	9
Increase chances of studying abroad/ emigration	6
Reading skills	4
Grammar	4
Vocabulary	2
Autonomy	1
Critical thinking	1
Confidence	1
Total number of aims identified by participants	97

*n=69. Participants could give up to five aims.*

**Table 6: Aims of IELTS preparation programs**

Only 12 respondents said they had to work in rooms with fixed seats all the time, so it would seem that many, if not most, classes are taught in classrooms rather than lecture theatres, something which would facilitate group work.

Agent	Frequency	%
Teacher	29	42
Administration	22	32
Text book	9	13
I don't know/others	8	12
Colleagues	1	1

*n=69. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.*

**Table 7: Who designs the syllabus**

The largest proportion of the programs was designed by the teachers themselves (42%) but a similar proportion of syllabi was designed by administrators (32%) or derived from the course book (12%) (Table 7). The materials are generally selected by the administrators (45%) or the teachers themselves (43%) (Table 8). Taken together, these findings indicate that administrators have a significant influence on teaching.

Category	n	%
Administrators	31	45
Teachers	29	42
Colleagues	2	3
Unknown./ No response	7	10

n=69

**Table 8: Who chooses the teaching materials?**

Class size varied from 20 to over 50, with most participants reporting student populations of between 20 and 40 (see Table 9). However, almost a third of the informants declined to provide information on this – it is not clear whether this was because this information was confidential, because of variations in class sizes or for some other reasons.

Range	Frequency	%
Not stated	22	32
0-9	0	0
10-19	0	0
20-29	18	26
30-39	17	25
40-49	4	6
Over 50	8	12

n=69

**Table 9: Numbers of students in class**

We now turn to the part of the questionnaire which tried to capture the teaching methodology of the IELTS programs. For the items related to teaching methodologies, we converted the Likert scale into a numerical scale from 1 (usually) to 4 (never). We then carried out a confirmatory factor analysis using the maximum likelihood method and rotated the factor solution using the direct oblimin method. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure was 0.534, which indicates the sample was adequate. Bartlett's test of sphericity gave an approximate  $\chi^2$  value of 1910.793, 861 df. This was significant at  $p=0.00$ . We assumed that there would be three factors. Following Hu (2005), we used a cutoff value of 0.50 in the factor loading (Table 10).

We have presented the results of the questionnaire in Tables 11 to 13. Table 11 follows the order that was used in the questionnaire. Table 12 gives the same data in rank order, from the least to the most frequent. Table 13 again presents the same data, grouped first by Hu's categories, and, within these, in rank order from the least to the most frequent.

Our data did not provide as clear a match between the three statistically identified factors and the methodologies as did Hu's study. Nine of the 10 items under factor one with a loading of over 0.50 related to CLT. The other item related to audio-lingualism (AL) and there were also two items which related to both CLT and AL. Five out of seven items under factor two with a loading of 0.50 or over related to grammar translation (GT) and four to AL. These figures include two items which were related to both GT and AL. Factor three was not linked to the audio-lingual method in the same way.

Only one item under factor three exceeded a loading of 0.50 – teacher-developed materials. However, there were two items between 0.40 and 0.50 – teacher-fronted instruction and teacher-centred classes – so it may reflect a methodology whose defining feature is that it is teacher centred. While our findings, as they relate to the link between factor one and CLT, parallel Hu’s study, they differed in terms of grammar translation, which was linked to factor three in his study, and audio-lingualism, which was linked to factor two.

		Factor		
<b>Pedagogical orientation</b>	<b>Methods</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
1. Focus on students’ knowledge of the rules of English	GT	-0.278	0.531	0.298
2. Predominant attention to reading and writing	GT	-0.504	0.159	-0.301
3. Emphasis on grammar and phonetic accuracy	GT	-0.153	0.576	0.193
4. Predominant attention to aural and oral skills	AL	0.444	0.441	0.358
5. Balanced attention to the four skills	CLT	0.485	0.352	-0.251
6. Focus on students’ ability to use English	CLT	0.457	0.338	-0.123
<b>Instructional content and presentation</b>				
7. Explanation of grammar rules	GT	-0.512	0.633	-0.247
8. Illustration of grammar rules	GT	-0.351	0.417	-0.507
9. Explanation of texts sentence by sentence	GT	-0.594	0.290	0.136
10. Parsing of sentences in texts	GT	-0.641	0.305	0.197
11. Contrastive analysis of Chinese & English	GT	-0.550	0.143	0.283
12. Explicit & direct correction of learner errors	GT/ALM	-0.117	0.331	0.116
13. Use of English in conducting a lesson	ALM/CLT	0.676	0.120	-0.175
14. Inductive teaching of grammar	ALM/CLT	0.176	0.330	-0.593
15. Teaching of communicative functions	CLT	0.686	0.280	0.138
16. Cultures of English-speaking people	CLT	0.209	0.041	-0.126
17. Use of open-ended questions	CLT	0.626	0.220	0.074
<b>Language practice</b>				
18. Grammar exercises	GT	-0.216	0.600	-0.550
19. Translation exercises	GT	-0.472	0.428	0.097
20. Sentence pattern practice	ALM	-0.361	0.655	0.132
21. Reading-aloud of dialogues & texts	ALM	-0.337	0.554	0.173
22. Memorisation of dialogues & texts	ALM	-0.206	0.247	0.061
23. Prepared language performance	ALM	0.507	0.354	0.234
24. Teacher-student interaction in English	CLT	0.830	0.299	0.017
25. Games & activities resembling real-world tasks	CLT	0.632	0.335	0.221
26. Constant exposure to new language input	CLT	0.629	0.251	-0.026
27. Communication in English among students	CLT	0.781	0.282	0.006
28. Integrated practice in the four language skills	CLT	0.489	0.313	-0.231
29. Reading & writing about various topics	CLT	-0.130	0.209	-0.428
30. Listening & speaking about various topics*	CLT	0.575	0.437	0.226

<b>Teacher and learner roles</b>				
31. Teacher talk for most of class time	GT	-0.689	0.011	0.296
32. Teacher-fronted instruction	GT/ALM	-0.528	0.157	0.418
33. Teacher control over everything which happens in class	GT/ALM	-0.622	0.172	0.412
34. Pair & small group work	ALM/CLT	0.736	0.208	0.161
35. Peer feedback & evaluation	CLT	0.430	0.265	0.377
<b>Materials</b>				
36. Grammar-based textbooks	GT/ALM	-0.412	0.656	-0.215
37. Adherence to prescribed textbooks from IELTS authorities	CLT	0.141	0.027	-0.271
38. Teacher-developed materials	CLT	-0.223	0.423	0.548
39. Authentic materials	CLT	0.056	0.480	0.384
<b>Assessment</b>				
40. Knowledge about grammar and vocabulary	GT/AL	-0.370	0.362	-0.116
41. Ability to use the target language	CLT	0.101	0.064	-0.058
42. Focus on communicative ability*	CLT	0.330	0.049	-0.087

Extraction Method: Maximum Likelihood. 3 factors extracted. 7 iterations required. Items with \* were not included in Hu (2005)

**Table 10: Factor matrix**

		<b>Factor</b>	
<b>Pedagogical orientation</b>	<b>Methods</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
1. Focus on students' knowledge of the rules of English	GT	-0.278	0.531
2. Predominant attention to reading and writing	GT	-0.504	0.159
3. Emphasis on grammar and phonetic accuracy	GT	-0.153	0.576
4. Predominant attention to aural and oral skills	AL	0.444	0.441
5. Balanced attention to the four skills	CLT	0.485	0.352
6. Focus on students' ability to use English	CLT	0.457	0.338
<b>Instructional content and presentation</b>			
7. Explanation of grammar rules	GT	-0.512	0.633
8. Illustration of grammar rules	GT	-0.351	0.417
9. Explanation of texts sentence by sentence	GT	-0.594	0.290
10. Parsing of sentences in texts	GT	-0.641	0.305
11. Contrastive analysis of Chinese & English	GT	-0.550	0.143
12. Explicit & direct correction of learner errors	GT/ALM	-0.117	0.331
13. Use of English in conducting a lesson	ALM/CLT	0.676	0.120
14. Inductive teaching of grammar	ALM/CLT	0.176	0.330
15. Teaching of communicative functions	CLT	0.686	0.280
16. Cultures of English-speaking people	CLT	0.209	0.041
17. Use of open-ended questions	CLT	0.626	0.220

<b>Language practice</b>			
18. Grammar exercises	GT	-0.216	0.600
19. Translation exercises	GT	-0.472	0.428
20. Sentence pattern practice	ALM	-0.361	0.655
21. Reading-aloud of dialogues & texts	ALM	-0.337	0.554
22. Memorisation of dialogues & texts	ALM	-0.206	0.247
23. Prepared language performance	ALM	0.507	0.354
24. Teacher-student interaction in English	CLT	0.830	0.299
25. Games & activities resembling real-world tasks	CLT	0.632	0.335
26. Constant exposure to new language input	CLT	0.629	0.251
27. Communication in English among students	CLT	0.781	0.282
28. Integrated practice in the four language skills	CLT	0.489	0.313
29. Reading & writing about various topics	CLT	-0.130	0.209
30. Listening & speaking about various topics*	CLT	0.575	0.437
<b>Teacher and learner roles</b>			
31. Teacher talk for most of class time	GT	-0.689	0.011
32. Teacher-fronted instruction	GT/ALM	-0.528	0.157
33. Teacher control over everything which happens in class	GT/ALM	-0.622	0.172
34. Pair & small group work	ALM/CLT	0.736	0.208
35. Peer feedback & evaluation	CLT	0.430	0.265
<b>Materials</b>			
36. Grammar-based textbooks	GT/ALM	-0.412	0.656
37. Adherence to prescribed textbooks from IELTS authorities	CLT	0.141	0.027
38. Teacher-developed materials	CLT	-0.223	0.423
39. Authentic materials	CLT	0.056	0.480
<b>Assessment</b>			
40. Knowledge about grammar and vocabulary	GT/AL	-0.370	0.362
41. Ability to use the target language	CLT	0.101	0.064
42. Focus on communicative ability*	CLT	0.330	0.049

Extraction Method: Maximum Likelihood. 3 factors extracted. 7 iterations required. Items with \* were not included in Hu (2005)

**Table 11: Factor matrix**

<b>Pedagogical orientation</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>Meth</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
1. Focus on students' knowledge of the rules of English	22	GT	2.23	0.824
2. Predominant attention to reading and writing	25	GT	2.28	0.968
3. Emphasis on grammar and phonetic accuracy	26	GT/AL	2.33	0.870
4. Predominant attention to aural and oral skills	18	AL	2.08	0.954
5. Balanced attention to the four skills	11	CLT	1.97	0.983
6. Focus on students' ability to use English	3	CLT	1.41	0.616

<b>Instructional content and presentation</b>				
7. Explanation of grammar rules	34	GT	2.64	0.775
8. Illustration of grammar rules	35	GT	2.64	0.753
9. Explanation of texts sentence by sentence	41	GT	3.05	0.865
11. Contrastive analysis of Chinese & English	29	GT/AL	2.43	0.884
12. Explicit & direct correction of learner errors	28	GT/AL	2.38	0.711
13. Use of English in conducting a lesson	6	AL/CLT	1.84	0.916
14. Inductive teaching of grammar	27	AL/CLT	2.36	0.932
15. Teaching of communicative functions	7	CLT	1.90	0.790
16. Cultures of English-speaking people	14	CLT	2.03	0.774
17. Use of open-ended questions	9	CLT	1.97	0.795
<b>Language practice</b>				
18. Grammar exercises	39	GT	2.87	0.763
19. Translation exercises	38	GT	2.85	0.813
20. Sentence pattern practice	31	AL	2.51	0.849
21. Reading-aloud of dialogues & texts	37	AL	2.74	0.893
22. Memorisation of dialogues & texts	40	AL	2.90	0.831
23. Prepared language performance	33	AL	2.62	0.952
24. Teacher-student interaction in English	5	CLT	1.74	0.814
25. Games & activities resembling real-world tasks	23	CLT	2.26	0.874
26. Constant exposure to new language input	20	CLT	2.15	0.853
27. Communication in English among students	16	CLT	2.05	0.902
28. Integrated practice in the four language skills	15	CLT	2.03	0.875
29. Reading & writing about various topics	13	CLT	2.02	0.866
30. Listening & speaking about various topics*	10	AL/CLT	1.97	0.930
<b>Teacher and learner roles</b>				
31. Teacher talk for most of class time	24	GT	2.26	0.964
32. Teacher-fronted instruction	8	GT/AL	1.95	0.784
33. Teacher control over everything which happens in class	12	GT/AL	2.00	0.894
34. Pair & small group work	19	CLT	2.11	0.819
35. Peer feedback & evaluation	32	CLT	2.51	0.829
<b>Materials</b>				
36. Grammar-based textbooks	42	GT/AL	3.11	0.798
37. Adherence to prescribed textbooks from IELTS authorities	4	GT/AL	1.52	0.829
38. Teacher-developed materials	17	CLT	2.07	0.981
39. Authentic materials	21	CLT	2.16	0.969
<b>Assessment</b>				
40. Knowledge about grammar and vocabulary	36	GT/AL	2.66	0.834
41. Assessment of use of target language	2	CLT	1.36	0.517
42. Assessment of communicative ability*	1	CLT	1.33	0.598

\* These items were not included in Hu (2005). R=rank order of frequency with 1 as the most frequent. Meth=Methodology. M= mean frequency with 1 as the most frequent. AL=Audio-lingualism. CLT=Communicative language teaching. GT=Grammar translation.

**Table 12: The frequency of items in the questionnaire**

Item	R	Meth	M	SD
36. Grammar-based textbooks	42	GT/AL	3.11	0.798
9. Explanation of texts sentence by sentence	41	GT	3.05	0.865
22. Memorisation of dialogues & texts	40	AL	2.90	0.831
18. Grammar exercises	39	GT	2.87	0.763
19. Translation exercises	38	GT	2.85	0.813
21. Reading-aloud of dialogues & texts	37	AL	2.74	0.893
40. Knowledge about grammar and vocabulary	36	GT/AL	2.66	0.834
8. Illustration of grammar rules	35	GT	2.64	0.753
7. Explanation of grammar rules	34	GT	2.64	0.775
23. Prepared language performance	33	AL	2.62	0.952
35. Peer feedback & evaluation	32	CLT	2.51	0.829
20. Sentence pattern practice	31	AL	2.51	0.849
11. Contrastive analysis of Chinese & English	29	GT/AL	2.43	0.884
12. Explicit & direct correction of learner errors	28	GT/AL	2.38	0.711
14. Inductive teaching of grammar	27	AL/CLT	2.36	0.932
3. Emphasis on grammar and phonetic accuracy	26	GT/AL	2.33	0.870
2. Predominant attention to reading and writing	25	GT	2.28	0.968
31. Teacher talk for most of class time	24	GT	2.26	0.964
25. Games & activities resembling real-world tasks	23	CLT	2.26	0.874
1. Focus on students' knowledge of the rules of English	22	GT	2.23	0.824
39. Authentic materials	21	CLT	2.16	0.969
26. Constant exposure to new language input	20	CLT	2.15	0.853
34. Pair & small group work	19	CLT	2.11	0.819
4. Predominant attention to aural and oral skills	18	AL	2.08	0.954
38. Teacher-developed materials	17	CLT	2.07	0.981
27. Communication in English among students	16	CLT	2.05	0.902
28. Integrated practice in the four language skills	15	CLT	2.03	0.875
16. Cultures of English-speaking people	14	CLT	2.03	0.774
29. Reading & writing about various topics	13	CLT	2.02	0.866
33. Teacher control over everything which happens in class	12	GT/AL	2.00	0.894
5. Balanced attention to the four skills	11	CLT	1.97	0.983
30. Listening & speaking about various topics*	10	AL/CLT	1.97	0.930
17. Use of open-ended questions	9	CLT	1.97	0.795
32. Teacher-fronted instruction	8	GT/AL	1.95	0.784
15. Teaching of communicative functions	7	CLT	1.90	0.790
13. Use of English in conducting a lesson	6	AL/CLT	1.84	0.916
24. Teacher-student interaction in English	5	CLT	1.74	0.814
37. Adherence to prescribed textbooks from IELTS authorities	4	GT/AL	1.52	0.829
6. Focus on students' ability to use English	3	CLT	1.41	0.616
41. Assessment of use of target language	2	CLT	1.36	0.517
42. Assessment of communicative ability*	1	CLT	1.33	0.598

\* These items were not included in Hu (2005). R=rank order of frequency with 1 as the most frequent. Meth=Methodology. M= mean frequency with 1 as the most frequent. AL=Audio-lingualism. CLT=Communicative language teaching. GT=Grammar translation.

**Table 13: The frequency of items in the questionnaire in rank order from the least frequent**

<b>Pedagogical orientation</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>Meth.</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>S.D.</b>
3. Emphasis on grammar and phonetic accuracy	26	GT/AL	2.33	0.870
2. Predominant attention to reading and writing	25	GT	2.28	0.968
1. Focus on students' knowledge of the rules of English	22	GT	2.23	0.824
4. Predominant attention to aural and oral skills	18	AL	2.08	0.954
5. Balanced attention to the four skills	11	CLT	1.97	0.983
6. Focus on students' ability to use English	3	CLT	1.41	0.616
<b>Instructional content and presentation</b>				
9. Explanation of texts sentence by sentence	41	GT	3.05	0.865
8. Illustration of grammar rules	35	GT	2.64	0.753
7. Explanation of grammar rules	34	GT	2.64	0.775
11. Contrastive analysis of Chinese & English	29	GT/AL	2.43	0.884
12. Explicit & direct correction of learner errors	28	GT/AL	2.38	0.711
14. Inductive teaching of grammar	27	AL/CLT	2.36	0.932
16. Cultures of English-speaking people	14	CLT	2.03	0.774
17. Use of open-ended questions	9	CLT	1.97	0.795
15. Teaching of communicative functions	7	CLT	1.90	0.790
13. Use of English in conducting a lesson	6	AL/CLT	1.84	0.916
<b>Language practice</b>				
22. Memorisation of dialogues & texts	40	AL	2.90	0.831
18. Grammar exercises	39	GT	2.87	0.763
19. Translation exercises	38	GT	2.85	0.813
21. Reading-aloud of dialogues & texts	37	AL	2.74	0.893
23. Prepared language performance	33	AL	2.62	0.952
20. Sentence pattern practice	31	AL	2.51	0.849
25. Games & activities resembling real-world tasks	23	CLT	2.26	0.874
26. Constant exposure to new language input	20	CLT	2.15	0.853
27. Communication in English among students	16	CLT	2.05	0.902
28. Integrated practice in the four language skills	15	CLT	2.03	0.875
29. Reading & writing about various topics	13	CLT	2.02	0.866
30. Listening & speaking about various topics*	10	AL/CLT	1.97	0.930
24. Teacher-student interaction in English	5	CLT	1.74	0.814
<b>Teacher and learner roles</b>				
35. Peer feedback & evaluation	32	CLT	2.51	0.829
31. Teacher talk for most of class time	24	GT	2.26	0.964
34. Pair & small group work	19	CLT	2.11	0.819
33. Teacher control over everything which happens in class	12	GT/AL	2.00	0.894
32. Teacher-fronted instruction	8	GT/AL	1.95	0.784
<b>Materials</b>				
36. Grammar-based textbooks	42	GT/AL	3.11	0.798
39. Authentic materials	21	CLT	2.16	0.969
38. Teacher-developed materials	17	CLT	2.07	0.981
37. Adherence to prescribed textbooks from IELTS authorities	4	GT/AL	1.52	0.829
<b>Assessment</b>				
40. Knowledge about grammar and vocabulary	36	GT/AL	2.66	0.834
41. Assessment of use of target language	2	CLT	1.36	0.517
42. Assessment of communicative ability*	1	CLT	1.33	0.598

\* These items were not included in Hu (2005). R=rank order of frequency with 1 as the most frequent. Meth=Methodology. M= mean rank of frequency with 1 as the most frequent. AL=Audio-lingualism. CLT=Communicative language teaching. GT=Grammar translation.

**Table 14: The frequency of items in the questionnaire grouped by category and then by rank order from the least frequent**

However, our data do suggest that the best characterisation of the teaching styles reported by our participants is CLT. This is supported by the mean values of the items in Table 12, where a low mean indicates that an item was reported to be more frequent. Of the 11 most frequent items, ie, items with a mean of less than two, four were jointly coded. Nine of these related to CLT, four related to AL and two to GT. Again, looking at items associated with particular methodologies, the mean for the 16 items associated with grammar translation is 2.45. For the 15 items associated with audio-lingualism, the mean is 2.34. For the 21 items associated with CLT, the mean is 1.9689.

The data in Table 10 also suggest that there is a compound method which draws on features of AL and GT. See also Tables 11, 12, and 13.

We will comment on each section of the questionnaire, firstly, in terms of the differentiation between alternative methods and, secondly, in terms of the frequency of particular aspects of teaching and learning. The results for pedagogic orientation in Table 10 mirrored Hu's results except for two features, both associated with grammar translation, students' knowledge of the rules of English and grammatical and phonetic accuracy. Hu subsumed these under factor three but in our data they appeared under factor two. In addition, only two pedagogic orientation items had a weighting of over 0.50, and three factor two items were associated with grammar translation, a focus on students' knowledge of the rules of English and emphasis on grammar and phonetic accuracy. Table 14 shows that the pedagogic orientation mean came out as more communicative (1.69) than anything else.

In terms of instructional content, the methodology was communicative with the exception of the teaching of grammar, where the approach seemed to be deductive rather than inductive, something which is consistent with the focus on the rules of English and accuracy in the section on orientation. Three items under factor one, all associated with CLT, had loadings of over 0.50 – the use of English in conducting a lesson (also associated with audio-lingualism), the teaching of communicative functions and the use of open-ended questions. One item under factor two, associated with grammar translation – the explanation of grammar rules – had a loading of over 0.50. The mean CLT value here was lower than for the pedagogical orientation at 2.02 but this was more frequent than GT (2.63) or AL (2.25). The same three communicative items – use of English in conducting a lesson, the teaching of communicative functions and the use of open-ended questions – were reported as being usual or frequent but the least frequent item, occurring occasionally or never, was the explanation of texts sentence by sentence.

For language practice, there were six items under factor one with loadings of over 0.5, all but one associated with CLT, and three items over 0.5 under factor two, one associated with GT and two with AL. The mean for communicative items was 2.03, but both GT and AL items were less frequent.

Teaching and learning roles were not very clearly differentiated with only pair/small group work having a loading over 0.5. The two CLT items, pair/small group work (0.736) and peer feedback (0.430), did appear under factor one but the other three items in this category – teacher talk, teacher fronted and teacher control – had the highest loadings under factor three, although the loadings did not achieve our threshold level. This aspect – teaching and learning roles – was the only one where CLT items were not the most frequently reported (see Table 14). AL items had a mean of 1.98, GT had 2.07 and CLT was the least common at 2.31. As shown in Table 11, this is partly accounted for by the fact that the most common items here were coded as GT/AL, teacher-fronted instruction (1.95) and teacher control (2.00), and the least frequent was a CLT item, peer feedback (2.51).

A related factor here is that students and other stakeholders (those who pay the fees and those who manage the educational institutions) may well see teacher-dominated teaching as more efficient. The evidence from interviews and stimulated recall interviews supports this point of view.

For materials, the two items which had loadings over 0.50 were the GT/AL item of grammar-based textbooks under factor two and the CLT item of teacher-developed materials under factor three. CLT items were most often reported (1.35) with the one GT/AL item at 3.11. There was a strong tendency to rely on IELTS textbooks (1.52) and this seems consistent with the exam orientation.

We had expected the assessment items to relate closely to those for the pedagogic orientation but no items achieved a loading of over 0.5. In terms of frequency, CLT items were the most frequent (1.35) with CLT/AL coming in at 2.66 and this does parallel pedagogic orientation.

In broad terms, the questionnaire data suggests that the teachers were adopting a communicative approach to teaching but this was less true for aspects related to teacher and student roles, where a teacher-centred approach seemed more common. There is also some evidence here that the backwash of IELTS is more marked on the pedagogic orientation, assessment and materials, and this is consistent with the idea that backwash has more influence on *what* is taught rather than *how* it is taught (Wall and Anderson, 1995).

	GT	AL	CLT
Pedagogical orientation	2.28	2.21	1.69
Instructional content	2.63	2.25	2.02
Language practice	2.86	2.69	2.03
Teacher and learner roles	2.07	1.98	2.31
Materials	3.11	3.11	1.92
Assessment	2.66	2.66	1.35
<b>Overall</b>	<b>2.45</b>	<b>2.34</b>	<b>1.96</b>

*\*Numbers are given to two decimal places. The higher the number the less frequent the teaching methodology. GT=Grammar translation; AL=Audio-lingualism; CLT=Communicative language teaching*

**Table 15: Mean scores for aspects of language teaching methodologies**

We examined links between class size, level of teacher education, control of syllabus and selection of teaching materials and the three methodologies but did not find any significant links.

## 4.2 The interviews

Ten teachers from three different institutions were interviewed by Yan using a semi-structured format based on Hu's (2005) five categories of language teaching, and we report our findings in terms of those headings. The interviews were first transcribed. We did not correct any linguistic infelicities. The transcripts were chunked into idea units. These often corresponded to what we had identified as sentences but not always. For example, we treated the following sentence as indicating two features of pedagogic orientation, knowledge of culture and communication abilities.

*Most important thing for them to [is] ...to get general knowledge of culture, the native English speaking cultures, and communication abilities.*

There were also occasions when we treated longer stretches of language as one chunk. The following extract was treated as indicating that the teacher favoured the instructional strategy of using open-ended questions.

*For the next one, how could I put it? Ah...let me see. The IELTS Speaking Test is to assess students about their English level, to speak more and communicate more effectively. I do not use many 'yes-or-no' questions. I don't know whether they understand and they don't add the reasons after that. By this reason, I use open-ended questions, and they could speak more.*

#### **4.2.1 Pedagogical orientation**

The most common comment about pedagogical orientation, mentioned by six teachers, was negative, the avoidance of grammar teaching.

*I think most of students are very tired or disguised about the grammar.*

This may be a means of distinguishing what happens within mainstream English courses students.

*I believe every Chinese school, whether middle schools or universities; they did their job perfectly well. I mean the English grammar [teaching and learning].*

This is reflected in the fact that most IELTS preparation courses do not have a class which specifically addresses the development of grammatical knowledge.

The need for a focus on language skills was mentioned by five teachers. This generally related to which skills needed most attention. However, for reasons which parallel the participants' avoidance of grammar, this may reflect organisation and professional expertise more than pedagogic orientation, as the four skills seems to be widely used as labels for differentiating classes, often with one teacher being responsible for one skill.

Labels on the timetables may also explain why a 'predominant attention to reading and writing', and 'aural and oral skills' have higher ratings than a 'balanced attention to the four skills'. Many teachers conceptualise IELTS preparation programs as having four components, corresponding to the four skills and the modules of the IELTS Test. Five teachers also raised affective factors, generally to do with confidence.

*In my class I tried to establish confidence to speak English.*

This was sometimes linked to the decision to avoid excessive correction of grammar mistakes but more often to speaking.

The only other factors that were mentioned by more than four teachers were general communicative ability and test preparation. We were surprised that test preparation did not figure more often in the interviews and this was not consistent with the questionnaire data.

This provides a rather different perspective on the language classroom than came from the questionnaire data. There is a less clear orientation to communication and the most striking aspect of these data is the importance of taking into account students' feelings, something which is much more closely linked to how teaching happens than what is taught.

#### 4.2.2 Instructional content and presentation

Eight teachers said they analysed texts in class. This generally related to text structure or text attack skills (6) rather than sentence structure (2).

*I prefer to focus on the text structures and organisation.*

The provision of cultural/topic content was brought up by seven teachers. Culture was not seen as a major element in the pedagogic orientation so this probably relates to the use of such knowledge to support language use, rather than as something valuable in its own right.

*I teach various topics because it is what the IELTS examination requires, especially in reading and writing. We both know that reading and writing topics range from animals, environment, medicine to biology, education, language, society and everything.*

The question of whether teachers should speak English or Chinese in class was brought up by six teachers. English did seem to be regarded as the best language.

*It is [the] students' golden chance to practice their oral English and improve their listening ability.*

However, all six said they used Chinese to differing degrees. Three teachers did make a distinction between the analysis of texts and the presentation of skills such as brainstorming, on the one hand, where Chinese was most appropriate, and topic-based work, on the other, where English was more appropriate.

No other practice was mentioned by more than three teachers but the data here suggest that teachers carried out language analysis at least partly in Chinese, and discussed topics/cultural information, largely in English.

#### 4.2.3 Language practice

Eight teachers mentioned activities that involved students interacting with each other.

*Since the topics are often about some hot issues, so I arrange some debate for the students to think of more ideas and supporting examples.*

Four teachers talked of communication between teachers and students.

*I try to use interview[s] in my speaking class. That is, I become my students and my students become my teachers. I choose some confident, outgoing students to do so and then some not outgoing students to follow this way.*

Communicative activities play a major role in these classes. Five teachers mentioned topics here again. This would seem to be more appropriate as part of instructional content. The teachers may be talking about discussions but the data suggest that what is meant here is short lectures given by the teacher.

*I teach various topics because it is what the IELTS examination requires, especially in reading and writing.*

Overall, the dominant language practice activity is some form of communicative task.

#### 4.2.4 Teacher and learner roles

The most commonly reported role of the teacher was that of controller. This was mentioned by nine teachers. This role was associated with the teacher as information provider by four teachers.

*I think I control the class and present most of teaching content. Otherwise, I manage the pace of teaching and provide other important information to students.*

Six teachers, most of whom had presented themselves as controllers, also saw themselves as facilitators of some kind.

*I think I am a guide, who guides students to finish tasks in the class.*

It was quite striking that many teachers saw their roles as changeable.

*I would use several roles rather than one role only; my role can be an instructor, a monitor, a guide, or facilitator.*

One teacher made a point about the expectations of the students.

*Those students attend the IELTS class with an aim of getting a favourable score; in this case, they would rather be a listener, and they would think that too much time on those group work or pair work [activities] is a waste of time.*

Teachers provided less information about the role of students, though the implication of teachers adopting a controlling role would suggest that, as in the previous quotation, students take a rather passive role. Four teachers did, however, say that they would expect students to be more active at some points of the lesson.

*I give students some chances for them to discuss and compare answers together. I think students are easy to accept the suggestion from their peers instead of teachers.*

These data provide a more complex image of the classroom than that which came from the questionnaire data but it does seem that classes are still very largely teacher-centred.

#### 4.2.5 Materials

Seven teachers mentioned that the materials should have some links to IELTS. This often means the use of what the teachers term ‘retired questions’ or ‘practice books’ which include IELTS in their titles or are seen to be approved by organisations such as the British Council.

*There is just one criterion: retired questions will be used in my class.*

There was also evidence, which seems different from the questionnaire data, that teachers use a range of books rather than just following a set book.

*Yes, the teaching materials I use, one of them is the series... Cambridge IELTS, the past exam. I also use the materials, written by [name deleted], and so on. And also one book is by [name deleted]. Another one is called [name deleted]. A lot of materials are necessary for them.*

Aside from the four teachers who adopted this patchwork approach to teaching materials, three teachers reported the use of teacher designed/authentic materials.

*In reading class, I often select some materials from National Geographic to enlarge students' vocabulary and practice their reading speed.*

It is quite hard to identify the extent to which such materials are used in the classroom, but we would suggest that IELTS-focused books are core, with a range of other textbooks and authentic/teacher designed materials being used to support them.

#### 4.2.6 Assessment

All of the teachers who were interviewed saw IELTS as a test of students' communicative abilities but other aspects of language competence were also mentioned. Four teachers saw it also as a test of grammar and three saw it as related to vocabulary. Three also mentioned text structure, most often to do with writing. The findings here were interesting because of the absence of mentions of the four skills, which were frequent in the response on pedagogic orientation, and the inclusion of grammar, which elsewhere seemed not to be regarded as very significant. However, these are relatively minor issues compared to the fact that all teachers saw IELTS as a test of communicative abilities.

### 4.3 Observation field notes and stimulated recall interviews

Yan observed three lessons taught by three different teachers and then asked them to identify one aspect of the class that they thought was significant. He then asked them to comment on one aspect of the class that we thought was significant. The data were chunked and coded in the same way as the interview data but we used the field notes to make comparisons with the stimulated recall data.

We will discuss our data here first in terms of the aspects of the class that the teachers identified and then move on to those identified by the researchers.

#### 4.3.1 Teacher-identified features

The first teacher chose to discuss how he commented on students' written work. In this class, the teacher chose an essay written by one student and analysed it for the whole class. The teacher went through the essay paragraph by paragraph. The comments related mainly to the grammar but he also mentioned the paragraph structure, the links with other paragraphs, and the relative length of each paragraph. This is an extract from the relevant section of the field notes where the teacher dealt with the first paragraph of the essay. Except where stated, the language used is English.

*The teacher presented the first paragraph to the students using the overhead projector.*

*Student C was asked to translate content into Chinese orally.*

*The teacher interrupted and pointed out mistakes directly. (The teacher focused on the translation of two phrases.)*

*The teacher showed the reformulated answer to students and then analysed one phrase, "give priority to", for the students.*

*The teacher analysed "rather than" and then gave one example to students.*

The teacher said the most important aims of the commentary were to ensure that the students have "a holistic view of an essay" and "the paragraphs of the essay must be balanced". This reflects a view of writing as to do with the production of texts rather than individual sentences, something which is usually associated with CLT but, aside from the fact that the commentary was mainly in English, this is not a particularly CLT style of teaching.

The second teacher focused on the use of planning in a speaking class. The students in this class were not very talkative and a lot of the strategies that the teacher used were attempts, either directly or indirectly, to encourage them to produce more spoken English. The following extract from the field notes has two sections. The first was about the speaking paper in general. All the board work was in English and, in this section of the lesson, the teacher spoke mainly in English.

*The teacher identified some skills for the IELTS interview. The following points in italics were written on the board.*

- a) fluency with some thinking time. The teacher said the phrase.*
- b) comment+ filler. The teacher said the sentence and went on: “for example. ‘Oh, it is difficult/challenging. Let me think’. You need to have some words to say ‘Let me think’. Things like that”.*
- c) ‘Kiss Rule’: keep it simple stupid. The teacher said, ‘For example, this class will be postponed; delayed or changed to next week. Refer to page 186 for some exercises’.*
- d) Metaphor. The teacher said, ‘If you talk about one topic, How important Internet to you, you can answer like, It is so important like...’.*

The teacher then told the students to turn to page 161 of the textbook and gave them three minutes to discuss the topics in small groups. The teacher then talked, mainly in Chinese, about the first topic: the nuclear family. The board work was again all in English.

*[In Chinese] ‘Maybe the examiner will say [In English] ‘Do you come from nuclear family?’ You answer: Yes I do/ No, I don’t.*

*[In Chinese] Not much to say. How to continue? Relate to other people.*

*[In English] ‘Do any of your housemates come from a nuclear family?’*

*[In Chinese] ‘Or you can do good and bad points.’ The teacher writes ‘Advantages and Disadvantages’ on board.*

*[In English first and then in Chinese] ‘You can also talk about advantages and disadvantages.*

*[In English] Maybe you say, ‘I don’t come from a nuclear family but a nuclear family has some advantages and so on’.*

The teacher explained the rationale for this procedure as follows:

*Some students could not follow [the] logical thinking of these questions [the IELTS interview questions]. So I help them to systemise to answer these questions logically. There are differences on thinking patterns. The western is linear but Chinese is circular. Sometimes they want to say some sentence but they could not link them together.*

This again revealed a broader conception of what students need to perform well in IELTS, in terms of both cultural knowledge and study skills. This could be seen as part of the often eclectic theories of language characteristic of CLT but it was striking that Chinese was used by the teacher for a substantial part of the time, so again we could characterise this as a CLT aim taught in a non-CLT manner.

The third teacher was teaching a listening class. The lesson involved going through what looked like an IELTS Listening paper. Before the students listened to the CD, the teacher commented on specific questions and then asked the students to discuss the questions in pairs or small groups. The students seemed familiar with this process and a similar procedure was used in another of this teacher's observed classes. The fact that there was relatively little feedback at this stage did not seem to concern the students. The students then listened to the CD and then discussed the questions, mainly in English, in small groups. Finally, they reported back on their answers and the teacher provided them with the correct answers. The students' answers were generally accurate and there was no need for follow-up discussion. This pattern of teaching a listening class has many similarities to Field's (2008) model of the practice listening class, and the analysis of question might be seen as part of a diagnostic or skill based approach. The aims for this teacher were:

*to help student to familiarise Section 3 of IELTS Listening and teach student how they could catch the detailed information via extracts practices.*

The analysis of the questions is not a feature of mainstream CLT but it does seem to relate to some models of CLT where the focus is on developing, as well as practising, skills, albeit here, skills which relate more to exam-taking than to more conventional forms of communication. In addition, the style of teaching was typical of CLT.

#### **4.3.2 Researcher identified features**

For the first teacher, the researcher focused on teacher/student roles because the class seemed teacher-centred. This is reflected in the field notes cited above. The teacher said:

*I am the director of the class. Usually I give a topic to the students first. Then I will give them several minutes to think about it and present their own opinions. In this way, the students develop their ability to think for themselves.*

This fitted in with the dichotomy between a communicative aim and a non-communicative way of teaching. However, it did bring home to us that observing a class is not always the best way of deciding if a class is more teacher- or student-focused. While the class had seemed teacher-centred to the researcher, it is possible that, to the students in the class, they were being provided with opportunities for developing their own cognitive abilities, but, because this process of development was internal, our means of data collection did not reveal it.

For the second teacher, the researcher focused on the use of Chinese in the class.

*Because I notice that some students in my class could not speak English, this is the reason to speak Chinese. This kind of training classes, they don't have any kind of selection [for students' English level] before the class, so we [have] various kinds of students in the class. And actually, I also notice that we used to use Chinese in our language training classroom. It is also more efficient to use Chinese in such training. As you know, I just [have] four sessions [weeks?] in such kind of training. If I have [a] longer training period, such as one semester or three months, English is the first choice. But for this one, short one, the efficiency could be my first achieving goal.*

The impact of institutional factors is an important one here and it may be that very short courses, especially when students are used to non-CLT styles of teaching, make the implementation of communicative teaching and learning strategies difficult. There is also a more general point implied in the argument that the use of the L1 is more efficient and it would be hard, given the current state of our knowledge about the impact of the relative use of the L1 and the L2, to identify an optimum level of use of the two languages in the classroom.

For the third teacher, the researcher focused on the use of small group work.

*In the class, I just want to know how this question is going with students. By doing this (pair work), I could know the suitability of my present teaching pace. Additionally, some students will be encouraged to listen with higher passion. Well, personally, I think interactive methodology is my teaching style. This is medium-sized class, so teacher-student interaction become possible. The advantage for the approach I used is that students will be easy to follow and cooperate with me due to this humane way of teaching. In addition, students trust what I am doing in the class and teaching atmosphere is very harmonious.*

This again highlights the importance of institutional factors such as class size and, assuming the development of a relationship of trust takes time, the length of the course. It is also possible that the kind of teaching we saw in this teacher's class is also related to the teacher's character – what he described above as his teaching style. The backwash from the test will be mediated through the teacher's learning style and views on language, teaching and learning.

The data from the stimulated recall interviews does indicate the range of teaching aims and styles among teachers of IELTS. For some teachers, the backwash impact of IELTS is felt more in terms of teaching aims than of teaching and learning procedures. It also raises the issue of the role of the mother tongue in CLT. While few commentators would argue for the complete exclusion of the mother tongue, the teachers are using the mother tongue extensively, and the impact of this on learning is unlikely to be completely positive. There is also some indication that grammar-focused teaching is more widespread than the questionnaire or interview data suggest.

## 5 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Our research question was:

*To what extent is communicative language teaching a feature of IELTS classes in China?*

Our answer, as might be expected, is mixed. In general terms, our data suggest that the style adopted by IELTS teaching in China is largely communicative. There is also some evidence that the impact of the examination is greater in terms of the pedagogic orientation, or aims, rather than in the teaching and learning. Classes tended to be more teacher-centred than is expected in CLT classes and the use of the L1 was widespread. This supports Liu's (2006) finding that second language teaching in Chinese universities or language schools is conducted mainly in a traditional way, teacher-centred teaching in the classroom.

The study did not directly explore the reasons which might explain the teaching methodology that is used in IELTS classes, but teacher-centredness and the use of the L1 are both linked to more traditional ways of language teaching and probably indicate the persistence of earlier views of language learning, which may be more consistent with education cultures in China. These education cultures also influenced language teaching through the impact of the administrative staff on teaching and learning.

Although teacher-fronted classroom discourse may provide some opportunities for testing skills (Qi, 2004; Cheng, 1997, 1999), and the use of the L1 can enable the analysis of language, both features seem problematic in the Chinese IELTS preparation programs. We identify three main reasons underlying teaching methodology in such programs.

Firstly, most language schools, such as New Oriental and Global IELTS are commercial organisations. To satisfy students and their parents, traditional teaching styles are adopted because they are familiar to students and are thought to offer the best way to improve students' test scores. While the evidence for this belief is extremely limited, it does indicate that language education researchers do need to build up a more substantial empirical basis for the claims that CLT, or elements of CLT (such as learner-centred teaching and the avoidance of the L1) lead to greater language development than teacher-centred approaches or those where the teacher makes frequent use of the learners' L1.

Secondly, the majority of teachers in IELTS preparation programs are non-native speakers of English; thus, they cannot draw on native speaker intuitions (Rose, 1994) and believe they cannot serve as direct models for the students (Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford, 1996). In particular, teachers may not have the language to talk about matters such as organisation and argumentation in English and may have to draw on the explanations in Chinese that they experienced when they were learning English.

This reliance on their own learning experience is increased by the third factor here, the lack of teacher development in IELTS preparation. Although IELTS conferences have been organised in various forms by British Council, most conferences focus more on explaining the IELTS process and promoting or advertising opportunities for sponsored language schools. There are fewer obvious channels for information about IELTS teaching methodology.

In terms of research, our data did confirm that Hu's (2005) questionnaire is a useful instrument for identifying CLT classes. We did not find a clear link between different factors and AL or GT styles of teaching. One possible explanation is that our participants were practicing teachers while Hu's were engaged in a teacher education program. It may be that our participants were closer to the sometimes messy reality of the classroom, while Hu's were more influenced by the descriptions of the different methodology. Teachers may over-estimate the distinctions between methods when they are not currently involved in classroom teaching.

The differences between our findings and Hu's also provide another perspective on the relationship between methods and language teaching. So Richards says:

*While traditional views of teacher-learning often viewed the teachers' task as the application of theory to practice, more recent views see teacher-learning as the theorisation of practice. (2008, p 164)*

Teacher education may indeed have changed in these terms but it is also possible that those on teacher education programs may see what teachers do as the application of theory to practice, while classroom teachers may see it as the theorisation of practice.

The constructs of AL and GT were not appropriate for the description of the classes we investigated. There is a kind of hybrid methodology which has features drawn from both methods. These may be features of the particular classes we looked at but the AL/GT hybrid has featured in other classes we have seen, and it would be useful to find out how widespread this way of teaching is. There was also some rather more limited evidence that teacher-centredness, probably the best label for factor three in our questionnaire analysis, was almost as important as teaching methods in explaining what happens in the classroom. However, this is less an argument for identifying a new teaching method than as an example of how eclectic language teaching methodologies are developed.

We were also struck by the differences in the information that came from observation of classes and the questionnaires and interviews. The extent to which the mother tongue was used in class was not apparent until we observed classes and this suggests that investigations into teaching methodologies do need to be at least partly based on observations. This issue also suggested that we need to have a firmer empirical basis for the widespread view that the use of the L1 should be kept to a minimum and this may involve collecting a category of data from a group that we excluded, the students.

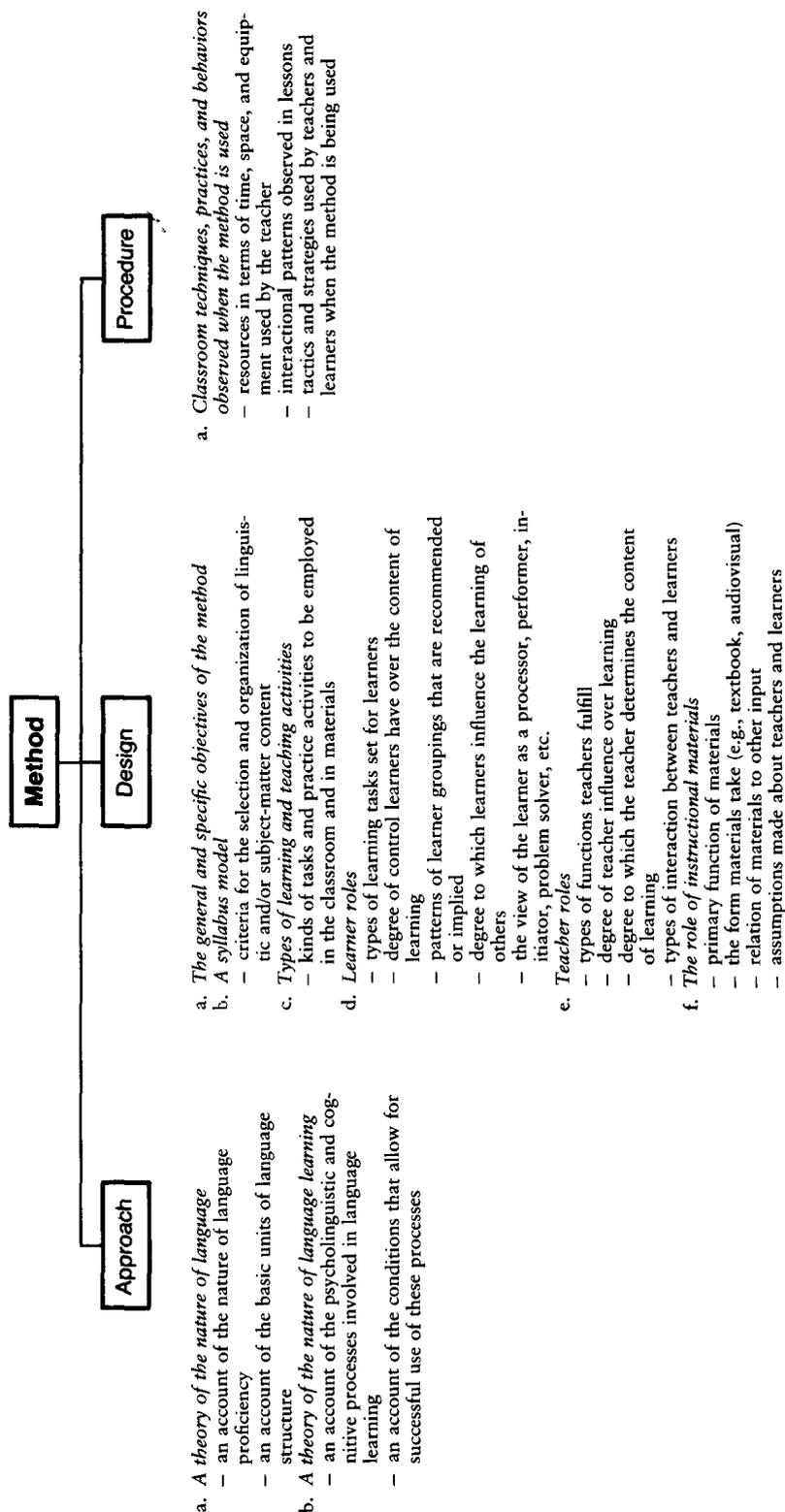
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## APPENDIX 1: METHODS



## APPENDIX 2: THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Discussion with teachers in Guangzhou led us to add two new items, one related to language practice, “Listening & speaking about various topics” and one related to assessment, “Focus on Communicative ability”. In addition, we changed the coding of the items about using authoritative texts from GT/AL to CLT on the grounds that we would expect IELTS course books to reflect CLT principles.

### 1. Introduction for this Questionnaire

老师，您好！

非常感谢您能抽出您的宝贵时间参与该问卷调查。此次调查的目的是想真实的了解雅思相关课程在中国教学的情况，希望您能帮助我们填写此问卷。请您根据自己的真实想法和实际做法答题，对于您提供的相关信息我们会保密。无需填写全名，不必有任何顾虑。

This research is trying to find out how IELTS preparation classes are taught in China. The questionnaire is based on a questionnaire in Hu, G. 2005. 'Contextual Influences on Instructional Practices: A Chinese Case for an Ecological Approach to ELT'. TESOL Quarterly, 39/4, 635-660.

Thanks for your help.

多谢合作。

### 2. Default Section

1. Which city are you working now In China?  
Guangzhou ( ); Beijing ( ); Ningbo ( ); Chengdu ( ); Chongqing ( )
2. What is your family Name (只填姓in Pinyin)?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. For how many years have you been an English teacher?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. For how many years have you worked in the school/college/university where you now work?  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. For how many years have you taught students in an exam class?  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. For how many years have you taught IELTS preparation classes?  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. List any professional training courses you have done.  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. Have you taken IELTS as a candidate?  
Yes ( ); No ( )
9. What qualifications have you taken in China? (one or more choices)  
Diploma ( ); BA ( ); MA ( ); PhD ( )

10. What qualifications have you taken outside China? (one or more choices)

Diploma ( ); BA ( ); MA ( ); PhD ( )

11. How long do your IELTS courses normally last? Please give the answer in months.

\_\_\_\_\_

12. What are the aims of the IELTS course you teach on? Use as many lines as you need.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

13. How is your classroom arranged?

The seats are fixed. ( );

The seats can be moved. ( );

I am sometimes in rooms which have fixed seats and sometimes in rooms where the seats can be moved. ( );

14. Who designs the syllabus for your classes?

I do. ( );

My colleagues. ( );

The administrators in my organisation. ( );

The administrators in my organisation. ( );

I follow the text book. ( );

I do not know. ( );

Other. Please indicate below \_\_\_\_\_;

15. Who chooses the teaching materials for your classes?

I do. ( );

My colleagues. ( );

The administrators in my organisation. ( );

The administrators in my organisation. ( );

I do not know. ( );

Other. Please indicate below

\_\_\_\_\_;

16. How are your classes evaluated? (You may choose more than one answer.)

By students. ( );

By my colleagues. ( );

By me. ( );

By the administration. ( );

There is no evaluation( );

others, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_;

17. How many students do you have on average in your IELTS classes?

1-9 ( ); 10-19( ); 20-29( );  
30-39( ); 40-49( ); Over fifty( );

	Usually	Frequently	Occasionally	Never
The next six questions are designed to find out how your IELTS courses are organised. For each item, you will be presented with a statement about language teaching. Please choose the most appropriate answer for that statement.				
1. Focus on students' knowledge of the rules of English 侧重教授学生英语规则				
2. Predominant attention to reading & writing 以教授读写为主				
3. Emphasis on grammatical and phonetic accuracy 强调语法和语音的准确性				
4. Predominant attention to aural & oral skills 以听说技能为主				
5. Balanced attention to the four language skills 对于四种语言技能都侧重				
6. Focus on students' ability to use English 侧重学生使用英语的能力				
These questions relate to instructional content and presentation.				
7. Explanation of grammar rules 解释语法规则				
8. Illustration of grammar rules 分析语法规则				
9. Explanation of texts sentence by sentence 逐句解释文章				
10. Parsing of sentences in texts 分析文章中句子				
11. Contrastive analysis of Chinese & English 使用中英文对比分析				
12. Explicit & direct correction of learner errors 详细直接地指出学习者所犯错误				
13. Use of English in conducting a lesson 授课中使用英语				
14. Inductive teaching of grammar 语法知识的归纳教学				
15. Teaching of communicative functions 教授交际功能				
16. Cultures of English-speaking people 英语为母语者的文化				
17. Use of open-ended questions 采用开放式题目提问				

	Usually	Frequently	Occasionally	Never
<b>These questions relate to the ways in which language is practised.</b>				
18. Grammar exercises 语法练习				
19. Translation exercises 翻译练习				
20. Sentence pattern practice 句式练习				
21. Reading-aloud of dialogues & texts 朗读对话与课文				
22. Memorization of dialogues & texts 记忆对话与课文内容				
23. Prepared language performance 准备语言性表演				
24. Teacher-student interaction in English 师生间用英文互动				
25. Games & activities resembling real-world tasks 模拟真实生活的游戏与活动				
26. Constant exposure to new language input 始终让学生浸入语言输入的环境				
27. Communication in English among students 学生相互英语交际				
28. Integrated practice in the four language skills 结合四种语言技巧进行综合练习				
29. Reading & writing about various topics 各种话题的读写练习				
30. Listening & speaking about various topics 各种话题的听说练习				
<b>These questions relate to teacher and learner roles.</b>				
31. Teacher talk for most of class time 教师的讲述占用大部分课堂时间				
32. Teacher-fronted instruction 教师导向教学				
33. Teacher control over class 教师主导课堂				
34. Pair & small group work 教师控制课堂相关事宜				
35. Peer feedback & evaluation 同学间的反馈与评估				
<b>These questions relate to learning materials.</b>				
36. Grammar-based textbooks 侧重语法的教材				
37. Adherence to prescribed textbooks from IELTS authorities 坚持使用雅思官方指定的教材				
38. Teacher-developed materials 教师自己整理教材				
39. Authentic materials 真实材料				
<b>These questions relate to assessment.</b>				
40. A focus on knowledge about grammar and vocabulary. 雅思侧重测试语法和词汇的知识				
41. A focus on the ability to use the target language. 雅思侧重测试英语语言的能力				
42. A focus on communicative ability. 雅思侧重测试交际的能力				

### 3. Final Page

Thank you for your help with the survey.  
After you finish this, please send one email to Oscar Yan:

**[xiaobiaoyan@gmail.com](mailto:xiaobiaoyan@gmail.com)**

to inform that you have finished this survey

**Thanks a lot!**

### APPENDIX 3: A SAMPLE INTERVIEW

O=Researcher; G=Teacher

- O The first question is about IELTS courses' organisation. What kind of abilities do your students achieve from your class?
- G What I teach is comprehensive IELTS, students could learn four language skills, which can help students improve their basic language ability in order to improve their general IELTS scores.
- O Then, in your questionnaire, you mentioned that you 'usually' use for 'focus on ability to use English' and 'balanced attention to the four language skills' in your teaching. How could you do that? And why do you make take decision?
- G As I mentioned just now, because this is comprehensive IELTS course, I have focused on four language skills and students' real language abilities' improvement. This is the requirement from course curriculum.
- O The second question is about instructional content and presentation. In your questionnaire, you chose frequently for 'use of English in conducting a lesson'. Which language is more appropriate for the IELTS class? Why do you choose that language? Are there some things which are better in one language than in another?
- G Most of teaching language I use is English because this training course is four months' long and I can arrange enough time to improve students' general abilities. If I find the students have some difficulties to understand the text or what I say, I will use Chinese to translate for them in order to improve understanding. So, English is more frequently used in my class than Chinese.
- O It is quite natural. It seemed that you usually use 'teaching of communicative functions' and 'open-ended questions'. Why do you do that?
- G Oh...communicative functions...I think communicative functions show like this: I give students some opportunities to chat with each other and my teaching focuses on task-based. They can communicate with their task and their desk-mates as well as me. Open-ended questions will push students to provide more information, which is the basic requirement for IELTS speaking section. In addition, open-ended questions could not limit students' thoughts, especially in analysing writing content.
- O OK. What are the reasons why you 'parse of sentences in texts'?
- G I just paraphrase some important sentences from the textbook. I don't like to explain the text in detail; instead, I prefer to focus on the text structures and organization.
- O The third one is the ways in which language is practiced. Why do you choose to use 'integrated practice in the four language skills' in your class?
- G As I mentioned just now, what I teach is the comprehensive course. Therefore, I have to make integrated practice in four language skills according to course curriculum. I do not think IELTS preparation course should be divided into four different parts according to the different sections of IELTS exam.
- O It seems that you make more use of teacher-student interaction in English. Why did you make this decision?

- G Well...I think it is a good idea to have more chances to communicate between students and teachers. One thing is that I could not imagine how everything is going on one English course without any communication between learners and teachers. Another is that students can establish the confidence and trust on teachers' teaching if more communication is occurred.
- O The fourth question is about Teacher and Learner Roles. What do you think is your role in your class?
- G Well...I think I am a guide, who guides students to finish tasks in the class; I am an information provider, who provides some language knowledge and testing skills for students.
- O Why do you choose to use teacher-fronted instruction?
- G Well, although this is a training course for four-month long, the time is also limited sometimes. So, I could not give more time to students to discuss or do self-sufficient learning. Therefore, I have to use teacher-fronted instruction to present some important information.
- O It seemed that your students have more feedback and evaluation and students' pair & small group work among them. Why do you do that?
- G All right. I give students some chances for them to discuss and compare answers together. I think students are easy to accept the suggestion from their peers instead of teachers. Secondly, I think some solid contents are needed in some speaking and writing tasks, and group discussion will help them to achieve this goal.
- O The fifth one is concerning learning materials. How do you select the teaching materials? What are your criteria for materials selection?
- G This teaching textbook is selected by me. The biggest consideration is that British Council recommends this book, and many British language training schools use it for their IELTS training school. This is the reason I chooses it as the teaching materials. Some other handouts are from IELTS authority (Cambridge IELTS and IELTS retired paper).
- O The sixth question is about assessment. What do you think is the focus of IELTS test?
- G I always think IELTS test is communicative one. So, communicative abilities are the main focus for this test. In addition, language knowledge and abilities are tested. Finally, grammar and vocabulary are also the focus for IELTS testing.

## APPENDIX 4: EXTRACT FROM A STIMULATED RECALL INTERVIEW

The focus of today's course is to make some comments on students' essays. From my point of view, comments are important for students, because comments can let students know their problems in writing.

Thus, they can avoid the same mistakes in IELTS test. Comments can also let students know what are the appropriate ways to develop their writing topics.

Since there are not so many students in the class, I have enough time to analyse each student's composition and point out their mistakes.

Some mistakes are typical, which should draw students' attention.

Many Chinese English-learners complain that they write a lot but no one can tell their problems. This is the purpose of this class.

To develop a paragraph is the most important thing in essay writing. But it does not mean that putting paragraphs together can make a good essay.

A good essay, first things first, should have a reasonable and clear structure. So to have a holistic view of an essay is the primary thing.

To keep the balance of the paragraphs in an essay, students must pay attention to the word number in each paragraph. I think, the paragraphs in an essay should be balanced.

One reason is that some students in the class failed to finish the assignment I left for them. So I only analysed one student's essay (as one example).

The other essay is also an assignment I left for them several days ago. And I think I should give some comments on this essay.

I need to check whether they understood the topic clearly and how well they expressed themselves.

The students have received nearly three months' training. They have practiced a lot of topics during the course.

So I think it's time for me to give them some new and difficult topics. For one purpose, they can broaden their thoughts and practice their writing skills.

For another, the topics I selected are all from the old versions, which I think will be re-tested in IELTS exam.

I think I am the director of the class.

Usually, I give a topic to the students first. Then, I will give them several minutes to think about it and present their own opinions.

In this way, the students can develop their ability to think by themselves.

And then, I will collect all the students' ideas and rearrange them.

Thus, in the class, all the students can make contributions to an essay.

## APPENDIX 5: CONSENT FORM

Research background and aims: 研究背景与目的

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research, which focuses on investigation of how people teach for the IELTS Test. Research findings will be used in the research project for British Council.

感谢您同意参与该调查研究，主要目的是调查学生如何考试雅思听力部分试题。调查结果将在英国文化委员会项目中使用。

As a researcher, I have an obligation to those taking part in the project to make sure that nothing negative arises from their involvement. The ethical principles governing my research are set out below.

作为一位研究者，我有义务保证参与者不会受到任何负面的影响。本人将遵循以下一些职业道德：

Code of ethics: 职业道德

What participants tell me will be treated in the strictest confidence.

参与者所提供的任何信息将得到严格保密。

No individual will be identified by name.

该研究将不提及个人姓名。

Any data which I might use when reporting the findings of this research will be anonymised.

任何研究结果的数据引用将是匿名的。

Participation in the project is entirely voluntary.

该研究的参与是自愿的。

Participants are under no pressure to answer any question they may feel uneasy about.

如有些问题使您不安，参与者可以拒绝回答。

Consent: 同意

I would very much value your participation in this project and am happy to answer any further questions you may have about it. RMB 150 (£10) will be paid to each participant in this study. 非常感谢您参与该研究。我将非常乐意回答您相关该研究的任何问题。每位参与者将得到150元（10英镑）的酬劳。

If you would like to take part in the project, please sign below:

如您愿意参与我的研究，请签名如下：

**Signed**

**Date**

---

### Participants' Information Form

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_ Mobile: \_\_\_\_\_

Present studying university: \_\_\_\_\_

Previous major (BA/BSc/MA/MSc): \_\_\_\_\_

Planning study major: \_\_\_\_\_

Previous IELTS Listening scores: \_\_\_\_\_