LECTURERS’ PERSPECTIVES OF THE COLLEGE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING REFORM IN CHINA: A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT
The large expansion and fast development of newly-upgraded colleges and universities in China saw a corresponding demand for the teaching and learning of English as Foreign Language (EFL). This consequently led to the Ministry of Education of China implementing the College English Language Teaching Reform (CELTR) in 2016 to improve the teaching and learning of English at institutions of higher learning in China. Therefore this paper aimed to investigate lecturers’ perspectives of CELTR. The study involved a total of 92 EFL lecturers from a university located in Nanyang City in China. Data for the study were collected using a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with eight English language lecturers adopting purposive sampling. The findings indicated that the lecturers possessed a positive attitude towards CELTR and possessed a moderate understanding of the CELTR and on the whole had a positive attitude towards CELTR. Nevertheless they expressed concerns in implementing student-centered classrooms due to large class enrolments and EFL students’ limited language proficiency.

Keywords: lecturers, perspective, College English language teaching reform

Introduction
Since the beginning of 21st century, the democratization of education has witnessed the expansion of higher education system all around the globe including China to prepare graduates to meet the growing needs of a competent workforce. Over the past two decades more than 52% of the colleges and universities were newly constructed or upgraded. While there were only 573 universities in 1999, was increased to 1219 undergraduate colleges and universities by 2015 [Xie, 2016].

The rapid expansion also saw the increase in student enrollments in colleges and universities, especially the newly-upgraded ones [Tang, 2010]. Accordingly, these institutions and students required a corresponding increase in university staff especially lecturers. With the open door policy practiced in China, English is also fast becoming a foreign language of choice in most institutions of higher learning. Hence, there has been a great demand for English language lecturers and the request for a variety of English language courses that demanded a relook at College English language programs. According to the office of Improvement of Quality and Strategy, components and standards of teacher professional development should be prepared in a way that, on one hand enable teachers to understand the different and various demands of students in educational, emotional and social areas and on other hand, indicates teachers’ qualifications in professional knowledge, skills and attitude dimensions, and so on [Laei, 2012].

Consequently, the Ministry of Education of China implemented the Outlines of the National Medium and Long Term Educational Reform and Development Program (2010). This reform clearly pointed out that lecturers are the key factors to the success of Education Project. Quality education cannot be achieved without excellent lecturers, which indicates that the lecturers must improve themselves for the teaching and students’ learning. Alongside this reform were the Guidelines on College English Language Teaching [2016] that highlighted EFL (English as Foreign Language) lecturers’ qualities, levels and abilities are the key elements which can help to promote teaching
quality better. In January, 2018, the State Council of China emphasizes that “Hundred years’ policy based on education; while the education policy based on lecturers” once again.

Except for the requirements and challenges, there are always some opportunities with the guide and push of the English language teaching reform. Given more opportunities for learning, knowledge and skills, teachers’ performance will be improved better [Khan & Begum, 2012]. Since English is taught as a foreign language in China, the EFL lecturers are encouraged to participate in professional development training meetings and activities to learn and communicate with peers [Rui, 2011].

Based on this, the EFL lecturers must acquire the latest international education ideas, interdisciplinary knowledge and abilities to introduce and spread English language and culture in their teaching to promote college students’ better development to catch up with the time.

The objectives of education and teaching cannot be achieved without EFL lecturers’ professional development. And the improvement and development of the college EFL lecturers’ professional abilities and levels need policy guarantee combing with the lecturers’ self-pursuit and hard working together. However, most of the EFL lecturers have some difficulties on how to conduct reform and reflection to make progress to promote their professional development. There really exist some different kinds of setbacks and discrepancies in the process of English language teaching and EFL lecturers’ professional development, such as, student mass enrolment, heavy teaching burdens, poor awareness of the lecturers’ self-development, and so on [Rui, 2011]. So, it is very important to note the importance of professional development and awareness regarding the degree of this professional development will help us to recognize the teachers’ strengths and weak points to strengthen their strength and improve their weak points [Ayyoobi et al, 2016].

The College English Language Teaching Reform in China

In 2016, the Ministry of Education of China implemented the new reform on College English language teaching. The National Foreign Language Teaching Advisory Board was commissioned to draw up and issued The Guidelines to facilitate reform on College English language teaching and to improve College English language teaching standard and quality.

College English is a basic and compulsory course for almost of the non-English major students in the first two years of their college or university education. The main teaching objectives of CELTR are to develop college students’ ability in using English, to enhance their intercultural communication awareness and communicative competence and to develop into autonomous language learners capable of meeting the personal, social and national needs for development.

Under the CELTR the college EFL lecturers are encouraged to shift from the traditional teacher-centered approach to a more student-centered approach. Henceforth, EFL instructors are encouraged to rethink about transforming their teaching activities from pure ‘teaching’ to more interactive and ‘learning’ perspectives. In order to achieve teaching objectives, to improve the actual teaching effectiveness and quality, the college EFL lecturers and the college students need to take different ways and approaches, including lecturers’ teaching methods, students’ learning methods and the coordination and unification of them. Teaching methods pay attention to teaching styles and teaching activities, and pay more attention to learning styles and learning activities [Wang, 2016]. Tyler (2014) emphasized that effective teaching must be centered with students’ engagement [Tyler, 2014].

Teaching means refers to the tools, media and equipment for teaching and learning. With the rapid development of internet techniques in the Internet era, computer network technologies have become the indispensable modern teaching means in English language teaching. The modern teaching means’ main purpose is to promote teaching and learning, the most important is to assure the teaching effectiveness [Wang, 2016].

The Outlines (2016) clearly states that the main contents of teacher professional development are to update and enrich teachers’ ideologies, to promote professional levels, to study teaching methods, and to improve teaching performance. The main approach is to keep studying and taking part in teaching reform and research.

There is no denying that the implementation of CELTR, English language instructors are gradually realizing the significance and value of the change in the teaching and learning approach in the EFL classrooms in China. Nevertheless, since the implementation of CELTR in China in 2016, there has been no comprehensive study that has explored the lecturers’ or students’ perspectives of this reform.

Therefore the main aim of this paper is to investigate lecturers’ perspectives of the CELTR in China. More specifically the paper will explore the perspectives of lecturers from only university in China. Looking into lecturers’ perspectives, the scope of the paper will investigate the EFL perspectives in terms of their attitude and understanding of the CELTR and the challenges they faced in the implementation of the CELTR in their EFL classrooms.
The study was conducted at an institution of higher learning in China, which was upgraded in the year of 2000. It is located in the city of Nanyang. This case study involved a total of 92 lecturers teaching EFL. Out of these 92 lecturers, 11% were males and 89% were females. The data for the study were collected by using a mixed-method approach involving both quantitative and qualitative instruments such as a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted with eight respondents from the main sample of 92 EFL lecturers. The questionnaire was validated by a panel of experts and the pilot study findings revealed that the reliability of the questionnaire stood at 0.84-0.92. Both these procedures indicated that the questionnaire was both reliable and valid.

Results and Discussion

Given below are the main findings of the study. Data obtained from both quantitative and qualitative approaches were analyzed in order to present the EFL lecturers’ knowledge, understanding and attitude towards CELTR. Descriptive analysis involving mean value and standard deviation was employed to interpret the quantitative findings whilst the qualitative data were analyzed deductively and categorized to support the quantitative findings.

A total of ten items with 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Almost Agree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree, were used to analyze to measure the lecturers’ knowledge, understanding and attitude towards the CELTR. The findings are presented in Table 1 and Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I read articles about CELTR to know the trend of it.</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>0.857</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I read books and theories about CELTR.</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>0.760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I constantly improve teaching ability to meet the needs of CELTR.</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>0.650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand the key issues of CELTR.</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>0.734</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I discuss the understanding about CELTR with other lecturers.</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>0.687</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall: mean=3.64, SD=0.523

(Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree 2=Disagree 3=Almost Agree, 4=Agree 5=Strongly Agree)

The findings in Table 1 showed that on the whole the lecturers have a rather positive attitude towards the CELTR (M=3.64). They are also taking positive steps towards gaining a better understanding of CELTR as they are involved in reading books (M=3.57) and articles to gain an in-depth understanding of the reform. More importantly, they discuss and enhance their understanding by discussing CELTR with their colleagues (M=3.89).

On the other hand their knowledge and understanding of the College English Language Teaching Reform is at the moderate level as their understanding of key issues recorded a mean score of 3.29. Nevertheless, they are seen taking positive steps to enhance their practice in EFL teaching as they are actively involved in improving their teaching ability to meet the demands of CELTR (M=3.92).

The above findings from the quantitative data were further corroborated with the qualitative findings obtained from the interviews conducted with eight English language lecturers. The eight respondents in this case study were referred to as Sample C in this study. Hence C1 referred to as Respondent C1 whilst C4F meant Respondent number 4 who is a female.
The interview session also explored the College English language lecturers’ perspectives on their knowledge and understanding of the College English Language Teaching including the aim of CELTR and the role of EFL instructors in CELTR.

4.1 Aim of CELTR
One of the main aspects investigated was the eight lecturers’ understanding of the aim of CELTR. On the whole, all eight respondents displayed a moderate understanding of the aim and what changes it aspired to bring into the EFL classrooms. This is displayed in the excerpts from three respondents.

“Firstly, I must make the students understand the objectives of the college English learning. One of the aims is that they have to pass CET-4 (College English Test Band 4 for college students after the first two years’ English language learning) (C1F).

“For the College English Language Teaching and the Reform, the aim is to cultivate the students’ ability of listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating. During the process of learning language, they can learn culture knowledge through the teaching contents and exercises” (C2M).

“What I must do is to introduce the culture and the usage of new words, which is the language and knowledge in the textbook…We should do more discussions about the College English Language Teaching Reform” (C3F).

According to the English language lecturers’ statements, they understood the main aim of the CELTR. Thus, they could guide the college students to learn College English with clear direction and purpose, help them to finish teaching tasks and achieve the teaching objectives, which was more helpful for the students’ better improvement and development.

According to Rui (2011), for any new reform to be effective instructors need to have a good understanding. Under the guide of CELTR, the lecturers showed corresponding changes and the most important was to update their knowledge and understanding.

4.2 Lecturers’ Roles under the College English Language Teaching
When talking about the lecturers’ roles, which were also the key points of the College English Language Teaching Reform, some EFL lecturers held the following ideas.

“The general situation of my teaching (before the reform), including the teaching modes and means was traditional with no much innovation” (C4F).

“There was no much change about the teaching mode. In the class, I dominated the teaching, the students mainly listened to me, and they did not participate much in the teaching activities” (C5F).

From the above excerpts it can be seen that the lecturers are aware of the change in their roles and how the teaching and learning has to be conducted under the implementation of the CELTR. Additionally, under the CELTR, they now have better understanding of their roles, especially how to guide and help students to learn College English. This was articulated well by the following three respondents:

“The Reform on College English Language Teaching asks the English language lecturers to guide the students to speak and practice their oral English, and help them to know more about the background knowledge of foreign cultures in class and introduce some sources and approaches for their self-learning after class by using modern social Medias, for example, WeChat” (C3F).

“During the process of their learning, we should guide, supervise and urge to make them study better” (C4F).

“I think an English language teacher should instruct the students how to study by themselves, to grasp the learning skills, and to solve the problems by themselves” (C6F).

The Guidelines on College English Language Teaching by the Ministry of Education of China (2016) pointed out that the College EFL lecturers and the college students needed to take different ways and approaches, including lecturers’ teaching methods, students’ learning methods and the coordination and unification of them in order to achieve teaching objective, to improve the actual teaching effectiveness and quality. Teaching methods should not only pay attention to teachers’ teaching styles and teaching activities, but also pay more attention to students’ learning styles and learning activities [Wang, 2016].
EFL Teaching and Learning under CELTR

Another aspect explored in this study was lecturers’ perspectives on the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language (EFL) under the CELTR. The main findings are displayed in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Teaching and Learning under CELTR (n= 92)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I choose different teaching methods according to different teaching contents and objectives.</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>0.693</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enrich my professional quality, ability and knowledge.</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>0.757</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I communicate and exchange experiences with other lecturers.</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>0.765</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I try using different modes to improve teaching effectiveness.</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>0.694</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I make a lot of preparation for each class.</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>0.732</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall: mean=4.06, SD=0.479

(Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree 2=Disagree 3=Almost Agree, 4=Agree 5=Strongly Agree)

The overall findings present the EFL lecturers have a rather positive attitude (M=4.06, SD=0.479) towards teaching and learning EFL under the CELTR. Their positive attitude is reflected in them been involved in spending more time preparing for their EFL classes (M=4.24) and selecting different teaching methods according to different teaching contents and objectives (M=4.22). They are also more willing to try using different modes to improve teaching effectiveness (M=3.82). Their positive attitude is also revealed in them making effort to enrich their professional quality, ability and knowledge (M=4.10) and willingness to share, communicate and exchange experiences with other lecturers (M=3.91).

The above positive attitude towards teaching and learning in the EFL classroom was also expressed by the lecturers during the interview sessions. For instance, the perception expressed by Respondent C5F below show that she is aware of the change in the teaching and learning process under the CELTR and how the traditional EFL can be enhanced via social media and current technology enhanced learning environments.

“There were few interactions in the class; the teaching was just like one-man show…so, we must change the traditional teaching modes, we can communicate with the students by social medias, like the group of WeChat” (C5F).

“I realize the importance of the student-centered teaching mode, and I try to meet students’ needs to develop them well” (C2M).

“I should set up the idea of student-centered teaching mode. The most important is that I should guide the students to study, to learn knowledge and culture by themselves. I am their helper” (C6F).

The opinions mentioned above were the EFL lecturers’ general attitude towards the CELTR, especially the new student-centered teaching mode and their roles in English language teaching. Most of them were willing to change the traditional teaching modes and to carry on their new roles for various reasons, so long as it was more helpful for students’ progress and development, and some lecturers showed their changing and improvement.

Roeser et al (2012) stated that when students felt they were valued numbers in a learning community, they were positively involved in classroom activities, thus, they could learn more because
of their greater engagement. The teaching mode of student-centered could promote students’ feelings of belonging in the classroom and thereby enhance their levels of participation in the EFL classroom.

### EFL Lecturers’ Concerns and Challenges under CELTR

This case study also investigated the lecturers’ concerns and challenges they faced in implementing the CELTR in their EFL classrooms. Both quantitative and qualitative findings voiced similar concerns.

One of the main concerns expressed by most of the respondents was the class size where large student enrolments hindered the effective implementation of the proposals outlined in the CELTR.

“There are too many students in each class, about 110-120 students. I think the teaching effectiveness is just so so” (C7F).

Besides that, few other respondents highlighted their concern on the limited language proficiency among their students and this made the teaching and learning of EFL as rather challenging. Therefore some of them felt that they were in rather challenging situations and were not well equipped to handle this aspect. This was presented by Respondent C8F.

“I was not satisfied with the general situation about the teaching. One is that the students’ language foundation was too poor” (C8F).

Additionally, some respondents highlighted that they needed more help and guidance in gaining a better understanding how they could implement teaching and learning process recommended under the CELTR. These lecturers felt they needed to be shown as to how the teaching mode could be shifted from a teacher-centered EFL classroom to a more student-centered classroom. Their challenge was further expounded by specific situation at the said university without impeccable and matched facilities and systems, which was not helpful enough to carry out the CELTR.

Finally, a few other lecturers felt they possessed rather limited understanding of the CELTR and hence sought help as to where they could gain a better understanding of the reform.

### Conclusion

On the whole, this case study has revealed that the English language lecturers have a positive perception and attitude towards the implementation of the CELTR in their EFL classrooms. The study also revealed that they have a moderate understanding of CELTR and are willing to improve their knowledge and understanding by reading more articles and books on CELTR and discussing their concerns with their colleagues. They are also willing to change their teaching and learning approaches as they are seen taking positive steps to shift their traditional teacher-centered EFL classroom to student centered classrooms via current technology based approaches.

These positive perceptions held by the EFL lecturers are however hindered by a few concerns such as large classroom enrolments, students limited language proficiency and lack of basic foundation in English. A few also highlighted the lack of suitable facilities to conduct effective student-centered teaching and learning activities. These concerns need to be addressed effectively by institutions of higher learning (IHL, hereafter) and one step that all institutions need to look into are infrastructure facilities that can help enhance student-centered learning.

On the other hand, a few felt they lacked the knowledge and understanding of CELTR to effectively implement the guideline proposed under CELTR. Therefore, it is important that steps are taken by the relevant institutions of higher learning (IHL, hereafter) to help address the situation. One strategy that IHL can take is to conduct continuous professional development for EFL lecturers. Such a move could perhaps help in the better understanding and more effective implementation of the CELTR.

### References


