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# AN INVESTIGATION ON STUDENT-CENTRED ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING AMONG CHINA HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS

CHEN LEI



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AN INVESTIGATION ON STUDENT-CENTRED ENGLISH LANGUAGE  
LEARNING AMONG CHINA HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS

CHEN LEI

THESIS IS SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT OF THE  
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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the effects of student-centred language learning and EFL China higher education students' views on the teaching, which helped improved their performances in English. Using the responses from the interviews with the tertiary lecturers, this study also seeks to investigate further on the lecturer's views of the importance of integrating student-centred language learning among China higher education students as a teaching method to teach English and improve learners' proficiency in the tertiary university. A mixed-method design was employed specifically an explanatory sequential design divided into two phases. In phase 1, a quasi-experimental design was employed and in phase 2, interviews with the lecturers and learners were carried out. Data was collected through pre-test, post-test, unit test, questionnaire and interviews from selected lecturers and learners. 120 EFL learners at the tertiary level of a university in China were chosen by using purposive sampling technique. Quantitative data collected were analysed using one-way ANOVA and paired samples t-tests, descriptive statistics, with mean scores and standard deviations. Qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis. Results showed that there was a statistically significant difference found among the two groups on the post-test scores for both EIT,  $F(2,177) = 34.349$ ,  $p = .000$ , and GJT,  $F(2,177) = 38.685$ ,  $p = .000$ . Themes emerged were practical application of language skills integrating student-centred language learning, issues faced by the learners when lecturers used student-centred language learning in teaching English. Overall, these results suggest that the student-centred language learning interventions were more effective than the control intervention in improving the language proficiency of the learners. A set of guidelines in a step-by-step manner is proposed for the implementation of student-centred language learning for teaching English for EFL lecturers in the EFL classroom context in China.



## ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji kesan pembelajaran bahasa berpusatkan pelajar dan pandangan pelajar Bahasa Inggeris sebagai Bahasa Asing di pusat pengajian tinggi di China. Kajian ini menggunakan maklum balas daripada temu bual dengan pensyarah pengajian tinggi, kajian ini juga bertujuan untuk menyiasat lebih lanjut mengenai pandangan pensyarah tentang kepentingan mengintegrasikan pembelajaran bahasa berpusatkan pelajar dalam kalangan pelajar pengajian tinggi China sebagai kaedah pengajaran untuk mengajar bahasa Inggeris dan meningkatkan penguasaan pelajar dalam universiti tertuari. Reka bentuk kaedah campuran telah digunakan secara khusus reka bentuk kuantitatif deskriptif yang dibahagikan kepada dua fasa. Dalam fasa 1, reka bentuk kuasi eksperimen telah digunakan dan dalam fasa 2, temu bual dengan pensyarah dan pelajar telah dijalankan. Data dikumpul melalui ujian pra, ujian pasca, ujian unit, soal selidik dan temu bual daripada pensyarah dan pelajar terpilih. 120 pelajar EFL di peringkat pengajian tinggi sebuah universiti di China telah dipilih dengan menggunakan teknik persampelan bertujuan. Data kuantitatif yang dikumpul dianalisis menggunakan ANOVA sehala dan ujian-t sampel berpasangan, statistik deskriptif, dengan skor min dan sisihan piawai. Data kualitatif dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik. Keputusan menunjukkan terdapat perbezaan yang signifikan secara statistik yang ditemui di kalangan kedua-dua kumpulan pada markah ujian pasca bagi kedua-dua EIT,  $F(2,177) = 34.349$ ,  $p = .000$ , dan GJT,  $F(2,177) = 38.685$ ,  $p = .000$ . Tema yang muncul ialah aplikasi praktikal kemahiran bahasa mengintegrasikan pembelajaran bahasa berpusatkan pelajar, isu yang dihadapi oleh pelajar apabila pensyarah menggunakan pembelajaran bahasa berpusatkan pelajar dalam pengajaran bahasa Inggeris. Secara keseluruhannya, keputusan ini menunjukkan bahawa intervensi pembelajaran bahasa berpusatkan pelajar adalah lebih berkesan daripada intervensi kawalan dalam meningkatkan penguasaan bahasa pelajar. Satu set garis panduan dalam cara langkah demi langkah dicadangkan untuk pelaksanaan pembelajaran bahasa berpusatkan pelajar untuk pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris untuk pensyarah EFL dalam konteks bilik darjah EFL di China.



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the effects of using student-centred language learning on EFL Tertiary Learners English Proficiency. This study is based on the available research, theoretical, and methodological literatures to illustrate on the investigation and effects of student-centred language learning in teaching English in one selected college known as the tertiary from the lecturers and EFL learners' views. In addition to this, this study investigated the EFL learners' views on the teaching effects of student-centred language learning which helped improved their performances in English proficiency. Using the responses from the interviews with the tertiary lecturer, this study also seeks to investigate further on the lecturer's views of the student-centred language learning as a teaching method to teach English in the tertiary university. This study will then propose guidelines for the teaching of English proficiency incorporating the elements of

student-centred language learning for teaching and learning in the EFL classroom. The procedures that would be used to accomplish the purpose of this study will be described in the following section.

## 1.2 Background of the Study

The purpose of this study stems mainly from the researcher's personal experience in teaching College English for university learners in China. English Teaching has become an integral part of life and a career since completing a bachelor's degree in English, 2007. However, after years devoting to teaching English in colleges, the effects of teaching philosophies and approaches have been doubted and reflected.

Conventional methods of teaching the English language (ELT) have been extensively practised in China over the past few centuries, with negative consequences (Ouyang, 2000). (Rao, 2013). It is widely assumed that teachers shape and command the instructional environment whereas students take notes passively (Rao, 2019). However, in the present day, the advancement of multimedia technology and the availability of internet-based resources allow for instructional improvements. The emphasis in the teacher-centered classroom progressively moves to the student-centered classroom (Huang, 2021). Similarly, the conventional roles of both educators and students have undergone changes (Fei Liu, 2022).

On the other hand, students in China are aware of the fact that good mastery of English will be an advantage for their future employment (Ruixia Huang, 2021). For

this reason, the students aspire to learn and achieve good grades in English and to do this, they have to ensure they pass the standardised examination to obtain the certificates to indicate their proficiency in English, boost their oral English and then find ways to continue and pursue their study after graduation (Ruixia Huang, 2021). However, students faced some issues in terms of their proficiencies and this is apparent in the national examination for instance around 20% of these students could hardly pass TEM 4 (Test for English Majors) and achieve good grade. This statistic data indicates students' poor English proficiency and for this reason, the ministry of education in China encourage teachers to be creative in their teaching methodology specifically for teaching English so that students' can be motivated to learn and achieve the required grade to pursue studies at higher level or secure good job after they graduate (Huang, 2021).

The teaching of English language in China in the past decades has been mostly influenced and inspired by the beliefs of traditional teaching (Huang 2021; Rao, 2019; Rao, 2013). Teachers in China employed and used the traditional teaching model to adhere the curriculum and ensure the main focus of the lesson is to complete the main and difficult themes or topics found in the textbook so that the students can pass the examination and attain good grades (Huang, 2021). In accordance with studies conducted by Chinese and Western experts (Rao, 2019), (Wette & Barkhuizen, 2009), conventional Chinese culture and the wider picture of the social environment have an enormous impact on ELT in China.

In China, English language teaching has evolved through numerous stages, including grammar-translation, audio-lingual approaches, and communicative





language teaching (CLT) (Ouyang, 2000; Rao, 2013). However, a few schools implement CLT. Most schools and universities use traditional ELT approaches (Huang, 2021).

The National College Entrance Examination (Gaokao) has been the reason why teachers in China uphold the conventional teaching beliefs and the Gaokao puts lots of pressure on the teachers as well (Huang, 2021). When teachers teach based on the Gaokao examination format, the teacher is viewed as the main contributor of English language knowledge and the authoritative knower in the conventional English language teaching context. In general, the teachers employing the conventional English language teaching approach are required and expected to describe words and grammar step-by-step, in a direct and accurate manner. Habitually, teachers are the one who control and take over the class in which they will be doing most of the talk and state all the main language points and aspects in accordance to their initial class preparation (Ouyang, 2000; Zhang, 2017).

In the conventional English language teaching classroom, students are the passive recipient of the language (Zhang, 2017). In other words, students are taught language rules submissively (Zhang, 2017). Students show respect towards their teachers through their minds and this respect is reflected in their classroom actions, activities, manners and behaviours.

Students are seated there in the classroom, paying attention to the teacher and taking notes from the chalkboard as much as they can in the entire lesson. The long-term consequence is the absence of learning accountability and independence in



students (Rao, 2013; Zhang, 2017). Considering a growing percentage of Chinese students studying overseas, they are termed as the quiet and uncritical "Chinese learners" (Grimshaw, 2007) or "Asian learners" (Gan, 2009). Although these terms may be stereotypes, they do signify the shortcomings of traditional ELT in China to some extent.

### **Student-Centred Language Learning**

Based on the issues the students faced in terms of improving their language proficiency, student-centred language learning was deemed important as a teaching method to assist the students with their English proficiency. Student-centred language learning as a teaching method is believed to give an environment or space for the students to grow and develop their abilities to use English language in a natural learning environment that will provide sufficient opportunities for communication purposes (Winarsih, 2017). Student-centred language learning will motivate and assist the students to use English in an active manner, specifically to the students in the tertiary learning institutions. Teachers in China have been relying on employing the conventional teaching method to teach English to their students and some past studies from other countries have mentioned that time is another factor that influences teachers' decision-making with regards to the appropriate teaching methods (Wang, 2011).

A recently implemented Chinese government reforming the curriculum has produced an evolving environment in which the oldest existing school system's cultural in nature pedagogical, and social standards are being questioned (Wong, 2010; Yan,

2015; Yan & He, 2012; Yin, 2013; You, 2019; F. Zhang & Liu, 2014). China's education system, which has been centred on teachers for many years, is in the midst of shifting from teacher-centered to student-centered instruction. There is a greater need for knowledge concerning Chinese teachers' experiences as they shift from a teacher-centered to a student-centered style to teaching. This is especially significant because teachers are obligated to help students prepare for careers in the twenty-first century. National policy has compelled Chinese teachers to adopt a more student-centered to classroom instruction.

The Chinese government hopes that this pedagogical transition will allow China to stay up with contemporary economic advancement. The education changes that have been implemented aim to create a free-thinking and innovative population to support China's sustained economic growth (Li & Li, 2019; Peng et al., 2014; Tan, 2016; Wong, 2010). The aforementioned reforms were implemented in 2001 and 2011, with aspects added on an annual basis, and have aims spanning through 2035 (Australian Government Department of Education, Skills, and Employment, 2020; Wang, 2019). The developments represent a different way of thinking and approaching education than previously had been adopted in the classroom (Fu, 2020; Law, 2014; Li et al. 2012; Li & Li, 2019; Zhang & Liu, 2013).

### 1.3 Problem Statement

For the purpose of teaching English language in the context of this study, teachers have been using the conventional teaching method to teach English to tertiary students.

However, the conventional teaching method has some drawbacks in terms of fully boosting the learning of English language and eagerness of students, and is also found to be not conducive to refining their English proficiency (Zhang, 2017; Huang, 2021).

Based on the point of view of teaching, English language teaching in China has for generations maintained an intense linguistics focus on grammar, reading, and translations through a technique known as "teacher-centered textbook-analysis-based grammar-translation" (Yang, 2000, p. 19). Traditional teaching methods include thorough grammar study, broad application of Chinese-English translation, and consistent memorising of grammatical patterns and vocabulary (Jiang et al., 2017; Hu, 2002). The teacher would demonstrate the to-be-learned grammar with model sentences at the start of the class. The grammar structure is then recited and practised by students by forming comparable phrases by substituting terms. The primary objective is to generate free of errors sentences (as close to the typical phrases in the text as possible) and provide rapid translations between Chinese and English. This method is regarded as superficial in nature, and as a consequence, learning content has remained at the "knowing" instead of the learning to "master" level (Starr, 2012).

English is now being taught as a foreign language in schools and training centres. However, there is a small or insufficient practise community. As a result, Chinese EFL learners confront numerous challenges, particularly in terms of speaking. When speaking is permitted, Chinese EFL students fail to speak fluently. Some of the factors influencing their spoken performances can be either linguistic in nature such as vocabulary knowledge, pronunciation, or grammar, or psychological, such as worry, shyness, or fear of making mistakes, and a lack of confidence. It is critical to recognise



that the roles of the teacher and the student have a part in the effort to improve speaking proficiency. Teachers must motivate students in order to support them. More importantly, learners must be intrinsically driven (Amoah & Yeboah, 2021).

Prior to the problems mentioned, an exceptional teacher was one who conducted a teacher-centred classroom in which students memorised what the teacher delivered. The inference to be drawn was that students who recalled what the teacher stated or composed would do well on high-stakes examinations, and that was the only thing that was important (Liu & Hallinger, 2017; Shengnan & Hallinger, 2021; Peng et al., 2014; Yan, 2015; Ye & Zhao, 2019). The transition from the current standard to student-centered language learning in order to develop future profound thinkers has the possibility to establish philosophical in nature, culturally, and academic standards conflict between educators and parents, students and educators, teachers and educational administrators, and within teachers themselves (Guo, 2013).

Teachers in China are aware of the China's national college admission's exam known as 'Gaokao', this examination is significant and important because students' admission into college is determined through the Gaokao's grades. Yan (2015) said that teachers feel pressure to main the students' scores in Gaokao as to retain the school's image and prestige and this can only be attained by ensuring students pass with high marks on the Gaokao examination so that the schools can be given and rewarded with added income.

Teaching and preparing students to achieve high gaokao scores has nothing to do with student-centered teaching reform practises. The content involved with teaching



in a student-centered manner, as well as the time needed for preparing student-centered sessions, takes time that hinders teachers' ability to cover gaokao subject (Joong et al., 2009; Lo, 2019). As a result, students who participate in student-centered language learning may achieve a reduced gaokao score. Lower gaokao scores may jeopardise student college admissions and the teacher's income (Tam, the year 2015. You, 2019).

#### 1.4 Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of student-centred language learning among China higher education students. Additionally, this study examined the EFL learners' views on the teaching effects of student-centred which helped improved their performances in English. Using the responses from the interviews with the tertiary lecturers, this study also seeks to investigate further on the lecturer's views of the importance of integrating student-centred language learning among China higher education students as a teaching method to teach English and improve learners' proficiency in the tertiary university.

#### 1.5 Research Objectives

- 1) To measure the effects of student-centred on tertiary learners' English proficiency;
- 2) To investigate EFL tertiary learners' perceived views on the use of student-centred as a teaching method on their English proficiency;

- 3) To examine EFL lecturer's views of integrating student-centred as a teaching method to teach English in the tertiary university;
- 4) To propose guidelines for the implementation of student-centred language learning for teaching and learning of English for EFL lecturers in China in the EFL classroom context.

### 1.6 Research Questions

- 1) Is there significant difference of learners' performance in English proficiency among student-centred group and control group in terms of the pre-test and post-test scores?
- 2) What are the EFL learners' perceptions about the use of student-centred and the effect on their performance in English proficiency?
- 3) What are the lecturer's views of integrating student-centred as a teaching method to teach English in the tertiary university?
- 4) What are the guidelines for the implementation of student-centred language learning for teaching English language for the EFL lecturers?

## 1.7 Research Hypotheses

Null hypothesis:

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant difference in the pre-test scores of English proficiencies among the student-centred group and traditional teaching method group.

H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant difference in the immediate and delayed post-test scores of English proficiencies between student-centred group and traditional teaching method group.

H<sub>03</sub>: There is no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of English proficiencies between student-centred group and traditional teaching method group respectively.

Alternative hypotheses:

H<sub>11</sub>: There is a significant difference in the pre-test scores in English proficiency among the student-centred group and traditional teaching method group.

H<sub>12</sub>: There is a significant difference in the immediate and delayed post-test scores of English proficiencies among the student-centred group and traditional teaching method group.

H<sub>13</sub>: There is a significant difference between the pre-test, immediate and delayed post-test scores English proficiency among the student-centred group and traditional teaching method group respectively.



## 1.8 Conceptual Framework

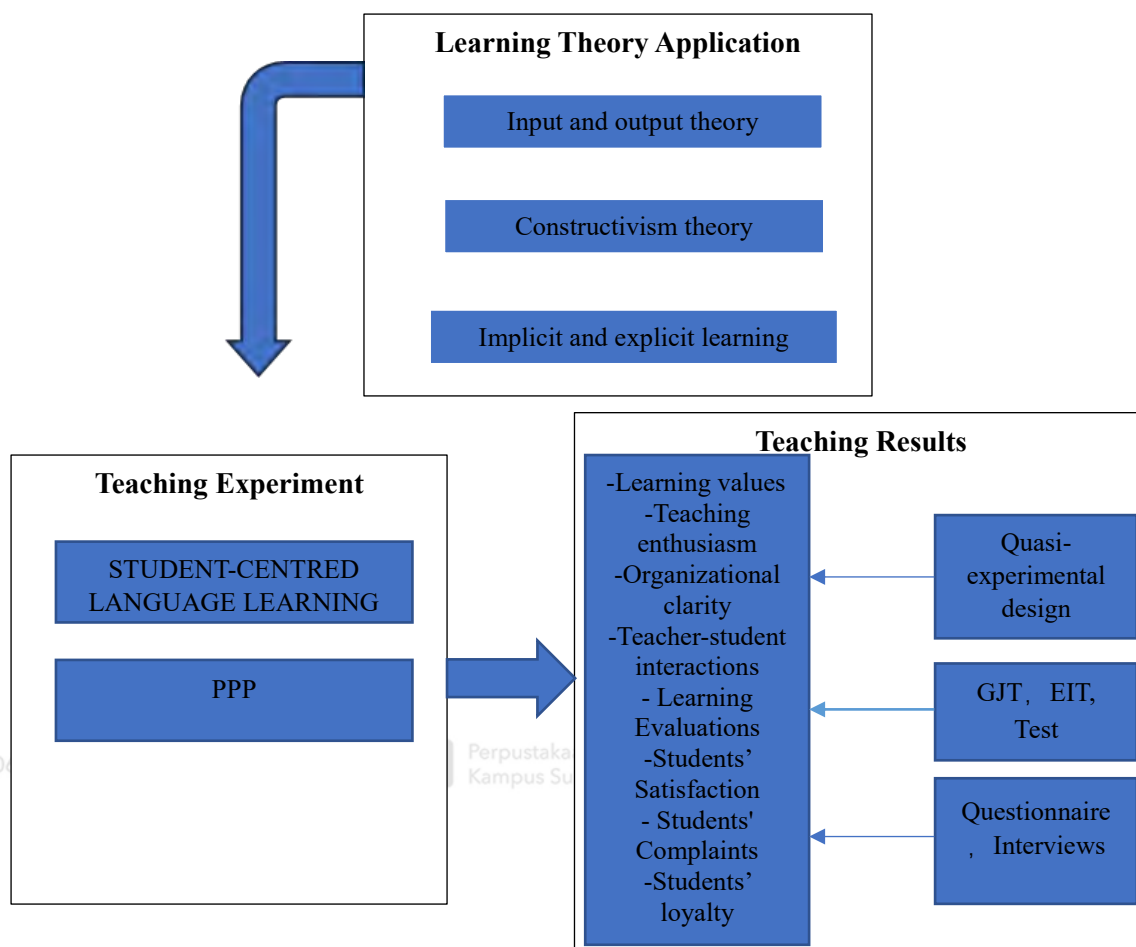
In this study, one experimental group was set up, namely the student-centred language learning and the control group, where the control group was taught using the traditional PPP method. After a whole unit of teaching activities, the effects of teaching are expected to be investigated and summarised to quantify the effects of teaching from three perspectives: classroom effects, teaching tests, and effects evaluation, of which the evaluation of effects will be conducted with learners as the target to investigate their perceptions of self-learning effects.

To explore the links between different learning methods and the resulting teaching effects, it is necessary to understand the underlying mechanisms of the teaching role. By combing through the existing literature on College English teaching methods in China, as well as the teaching philosophies and teaching processes of student-centred language learning, this study summarises and explores the differences between the teaching effects of different groups using three learning theories: input-output theory, constructivist theory and implicit-extrinsic learning.

The following is a brief description of the three learning theories and the reasons for their adoption (Figure 1.1).

**Figure 1.1**

*Conceptual Framework*



### 1.8.1 Input-Output Theory

Input-output theory is generally understood as the separation of “input” and “output”. “Comprehensible input”, which emphasises the importance of large amounts of comprehensible language input as a condition for second language learning, and 'output' theory, which suggests that attention shifts from semantic to grammatical structures only at the time of output, and only when the learner is able to produce “The 'output' theory suggests that attention shifts from semantics to grammatical structure only at the

time of language output, and that learners have mastered the language only when they can produce 'intelligible language output' in the target language. Both input and output are complementary and indispensable, and learners are constantly engaged in a process of input and output that ultimately leads to the desired learning outcome.

### 1.8.2 Constructivism Theory

Constructivism theory was developed in the early 1990s and considers learning as a process in which learners actively construct knowledge through internal laws (Vygotsky, 1978). This concept can be loosely interpreted to mean that the construction of knowledge is not entirely instilled by others but is accomplished through the learner's own active learning and understanding according to internal laws. In the process of individual construction of knowledge, lecturers do not interfere directly, but provide appropriate and effective assistance, and focus on mutual cooperation among peers to guide learners to identify problems, solve them and make progress together. It is difficult to meet learners' cognitive abilities with traditional knowledge teaching. Lecturers should guide learners to actively participate in the learning process, cooperate with their peers to complete tasks, enhance learners' initiative in learning and help them build up self-confidence in learning English, thus effectively promoting learners' needs for language learning and completing the construction of learners' personal knowledge framework.

The teaching philosophy and process of action of the student-centred language learning are in line with the claim of knowledge constructivism that lecturers do not

simply instil learning knowledge. However, as the specific teaching processes of these two approaches differ and the roles played by lecturers differ, their effects may vary considerably given the same level of learner cognition. In this study, the researcher used the mechanism of action of constructivist theory to specifically explore how different teaching methods help learners' knowledge construction and to understand the deeper reasons why different teaching methods lead to different teaching effects.

### 1.8.3 Implicit and Explicit Learning Theory

Explicit learning is a process of conscious acquisition of knowledge, meaning that the learner makes a conscious effort to achieve a goal by understanding, remembering and mastering knowledge with explicit rules in order to solve problems. Implicit learning, on the other hand, is a process of unconscious acquisition of complex knowledge in a stimulus environment, in which the learner is not explicitly aware of, or even categorically outputs, the rules of behaviour contained therein, but acquires them unconsciously. The two are fundamentally different, but at the same time there is a close relationship of interdependence and mutual complementarity, a relationship known as the 'synergy effect'. In fact, only by combining implicit and explicit learning and bringing their 'synergistic effects' into play can English teaching and learning effectively promote learners' second language acquisition.

By understanding the theory of implicit and explicit learning, it is possible to clarify the specific situation of implicit and explicit learning in the teaching process of student-centred language learning to distinguish whether the actual teaching purpose of

the different teaching methods is to achieve implicit or explicit learning, and to summarise the ‘synergistic effects’ of the different teaching methods.

## 1.9 Significance of the Study

For a long time, college English teaching in China has followed the traditional lecturer-centred classroom teaching model, which only attach importance to language input instead of language output. In order to break the long-term status of “dumb English” (Wang & Li, 2013) and cultivate international talents in the new era, college English teaching needs to absorb new teaching methods.

The proposal of student-centred language learning is believed to give an environment or space for the students to grow and develop their abilities to use English language in a natural learning environment that will provide sufficient opportunities for communication purpose (Winarsih, 2017). Student-centred language learning will motivate and assist the students to use English in an active manner, specifically to the students in the tertiary learning institutions. Student-centred language learning has designed an “ideal teaching blueprint” for college English teaching in China, but whether this ‘blueprint’ can be ‘rooted’ in the soil of practice remains to be seen (Zhang, 2017). In the absence of teaching materials and instructional design for reference, how does one transform the abstract teaching process of student-centred language learning into concrete teaching steps? All these questions must be answered in teaching practice. Since the concept of student-centred language learning was put forward, numerous related research has been carried out. The effects of student-centred language learning

and other teaching methods have not been compared in any existing studies yet, and empirical research is obviously insufficient. With the purpose of conducting research from quantitative perspective and measuring language acquisition in different approaches, a grammaticality judgment test (henceforth, GJT) and an elicited imitation test (henceforth, EIT) were applied. The reliability and validity of these tests have been proved by many researchers (in Chapter 3), and for example, Noroozi (2018) stated that the purpose of the GJT was to evaluate learners' cognition degree of rules in this grammatical feature; the goal of the EIT was to evaluate learners' speed to identify and use the target structure so that learners should be equipped with unconscious and implicit knowledge for this target structure. In this way, it would be available to measure the impacts of treatment on explicit/declarative and implicit/procedural knowledge of learners.

Moreover, due to the fact that Ellis and Shintani (2014) maintained that comparative research has been criticised as being unable to determine whether the compared teaching means does include unique classroom processing and teaching procedures, this study is designed to observe and compare the teaching procedures and conduct interviews and questionnaires from qualitative perspective too, besides measuring the language acquisition from quantitative aspect.

Following the suggestion of Ellis (2017) this study aims to the effects of using student-centred language learning on English proficiency of EFL tertiary learners in China.

The significance of this study is mainly reflected in both practical and theoretical aspects. In practical stand, this study is an application of local foreign language teaching theories in the context of China's local foreign language teaching ecology, which is expected to bring inspiration for exploring effective classroom teaching methods for English in China's universities and solving the problem of “time-consuming and ineffective” English in China's universities. Secondly, by applying and comparing student-centred language learning in university English teaching, it can promote lecturers to update their educational philosophy and improve their existing teaching methods, thus optimising their own classroom teaching, as well as to increase learners' motivation and interest in learning and effectively contribute to the enhancement of university learners' English proficiency.

Theoretically, this study is expected to uncover the challenges and countermeasures that lecturers face when applying student-centred language learning in practice, and to distil actionable pedagogical principles in the application of student-centred language, so as to bring reference and inspiration to peer lecturers in the use of these methods. At the same time, through teaching activities in real teaching contexts and through continuous optimisation of teaching design, the theory will be grounded in reality, so that it can be tested and enriched by practice, and the development of the theory can be promoted.

### 1.10 Study Limitations

The learners who study at the College English in this research are freshmen and sophomores in the college, which is located in the Southwest of China., Their English scores of *College Entrance Examination* are approximately 80-90 (with the full score of 150), which are average among second-class undergraduate universities all around China. It can be seen from daily teaching observation that the learners have a strong desire to improve their English proficiency competence, but lack in learning strategies, with limited autonomous learning ability; hence, it can be seen that they heavily rely on lecturers' "teaching". In terms of oral discussion and written composition at class, the learners have limited ability to apply English, i.e., unsatisfactory in accuracy, fluency, information density and discourse structure. It is known from the questionnaire and interview of the freshmen that the learners are very weak in "academic abilities".

Although the learners have certain sense of inquiry and discovery in academic, their ability to find and raise questions needs to be improved. Most of them have never read Chinese or English theses or dissertations and are very unfamiliar with academic skills such as consulting materials and identifying literature as well as academic norms like referencing.

After years of experience in College English curriculum reform, and more than six years of teaching practice, it was found that this course recommends content-based teaching, with the teaching topics of controversial issues or related to college learners, which to some extent improved the previous traditional intensive reading teaching mode based on superficial topics and lack of cognitive challenges. The application of student-centred language learning enables learners to complete the discovery task in



classrooms, and also cultivates learners' preliminary academic awareness and abilities (i.e., topic selection, information search, the adoption of research methodology, quotation, and paper writing).

Student-centred language learning is encouraged to be implemented in the context of China' higher education. As practising lecturers applying this method for the first time, my peer-lecturers and I, despite having nearly 7-10 years of experience in teaching English at university level, have faced many challenges and gone through a difficult process of discovery, with inevitable shortcomings in our understanding and interpretation of the theory.

As an initial attempt to apply student-centred language learning, this study has limitations in terms of depth of research. This study is an initial attempt to apply student-centred language learning, and there are limitations in the depth of the research. This study is a first attempt to cover the whole process of the student-centred language learning, trying to provide a bird's eye view of the application of the student-centred language learning and its differences from the conventional teaching method, so the depth of the study gives way to the breadth of the study.

The focus of this study was to look at the teaching approaches through the teaching and learning process of English language. Thus, it does not look at any aspects of the English language skills (Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening), the focus is just on the English proficiency.

## 1.11 Operational Definitions

### 1.11.1 College English

College English, also known as public English, refers to an English course offered to non-English majors in colleges and universities in China. Generally, it is a basic public compulsory course taken by most non-English majors in their undergraduate education. According to the *College English Teaching Guide* (2017), “College English is an integral component of humanistic education in colleges and universities. It serves as a tool and carries a humanistic nature, aiming to cultivate learners’ ability to apply English, enhance their cross-cultural communication awareness, and improve their communication competence. Meanwhile, the course plans to train learners’ self-study abilities and improve their comprehensive cultural qualities, enabling them to apply English efficiently in their study, life, social interactions, and future work. Ultimately, the course helps to meet the demands of the country, society, universities, and individuals.” In China, college English is taught through teaching EFL, yet its language environment and learning motives vary from those of teaching English as a second language.

### 1.11.2 The College English Test Band 4 and Band 6 (CET-4 and CET-6)

The College English Test, better known as CET, is a national English as a foreign language test in the People's Republic of China. It examines the English proficiency of undergraduate and postgraduate learners in China. It is meant to ensure that Chinese undergraduates and postgraduates reach the required English levels specified in the

National College English Teaching Syllabuses. This test has existed in China for 26 years and now 18 million people take it annually. It includes two levels: CET4 and CET6.

### 1.11.3 Student-Centred Language Learning

Student-centred language learning: Mascolo (2009) state that student-centred language learning is a concept that views the students as an active learner. In student-centred language learning, the teacher is not viewed as the main source of learning but rather viewed as facilitator in the learning process.

### 1.11.4 PPP Approach (Presentation, Practice, Production Approach)

PPP is a method used in traditional English teaching, and there are three teaching processes: Presentation, Practice and Production. In the presentation process, the lecturer introduces the new language knowledge to be learned to the learners. The lecturer tries to arouse learners' interest in the new sentence patterns, new dialogues or new articles learned, stimulate learners' curiosity, and check the learners' new teaching points understanding. In the process of practice, lecturers give learners many opportunities to practice, encourage learners to use the new knowledge just introduced as much as possible, practice repeated sentence patterns and continuously improve the accuracy of language use. In the production process, learners are required to use the



knowledge they have learned creatively, use language flexibly and freely, and achieve the goal of correct and fluent communication.

#### **1.11.5 Grammatical Judgement Test**

Grammatical judgement test is a proficiency test that was given to the participants of this study to assess their knowledge in grammar.

#### **1.11.6 Effect**



Effect refers to state of being operative or functional (Dictionary.com). In the context of this study, effect refers to the (effect of the independent variable which is the student-centred learning on students' English language performance which is the dependent variable of the study).

#### **1.11.7 Performance**

Performance refers to students' behaviour in a given test meant to evaluate a student's proficiency in language (Collins Dictionary). In the context of this study, performance refers to the college students' performance in pre-test and post-test.



### 1.11.8 English Proficiency

The capacity of a learner to utilise the English language to produce and communicate meaning in oral and written situations is referred to as English proficiency. In the context of this study, English proficiency refers to the college students' English proficiency used for communication purposes in and outside of the classroom.

### 1.11.9 EFL

The acronym EFL represents "English as a Foreign Language." It describes the instruction and acquisition of the English language in an area or nation in which it does not serve as a recognised or major language (Rahimi, 2012). English is usually studied as a second language in an EFL environment in order to communicate with English speakers in a variety of worldwide, educational, business, and private contexts. In the context of this study, the college students are taking EFL in the college.

### 1.11.10 Tertiary students

Individuals who are engaged in post-secondary programmes of study are known as tertiary students, or higher education students. After secondary education (high school) is completed, students often pursue tertiary education, which includes a variety of higher education settings including as colleges, universities, and technical schools. In



the context of this study, tertiary students refer to first year students enrolled in one selected college in China.

### 1.12 Summary

The research is completely introduced in this chapter. The very premise of this study has been covered in this chapter. The context of this study is thoroughly explained by the researcher. Based on the present problems with the status quo and various studies and research, the problem statement stated in this chapter has been determined. Additionally, the study's objectives were discussed in relation to the problem statement in this chapter. To help the researcher gather the required data for this study. Four research questions were identified and listed. The operational definition of the main components of this research has also been covered in this chapter. In order to paint a clear picture of the study's area of expertise and limitations, this chapter also clearly explains the study's importance and limitations.

