

Innovation in Language Learning

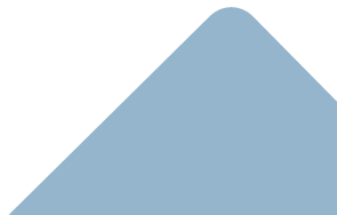
# Beliefs of Rural Primary Teachers About the Communicative English Teaching Transformation in North-China

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# Outlines

- 01 Background & Aims
  - 02 Methodology
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01

# Background & Aims

# Background

## Primary English Education in Rural China

1

English is one of the principal subjects in China's compulsory education.

2

Traditional methods (e.g. Audio-Lingual, Grammer-Trans) and forms (e.g. Teacher-front) are still strongly influential.

3

Exam-oriented learning scheme is prevailing.

4

New policies are being implemented top-down (DRP & New Curriculum Standards Reform).





## Research gaps

Scarcity in:

- China primary foreign language education
- rural areas
- teaching approaches and language policies



## Research aim

**This study aims to investigate in-service teachers' beliefs about novel teaching with communicative tasks in one North-China rural area.**

02

# Methodology

# Data Collection



## Location

A rural area situated in a North-China city



## Participants

**6 teachers who:**

- are in-service
- have experience teaching English in local rural primary schools
- complete an previous online questionnaire survey



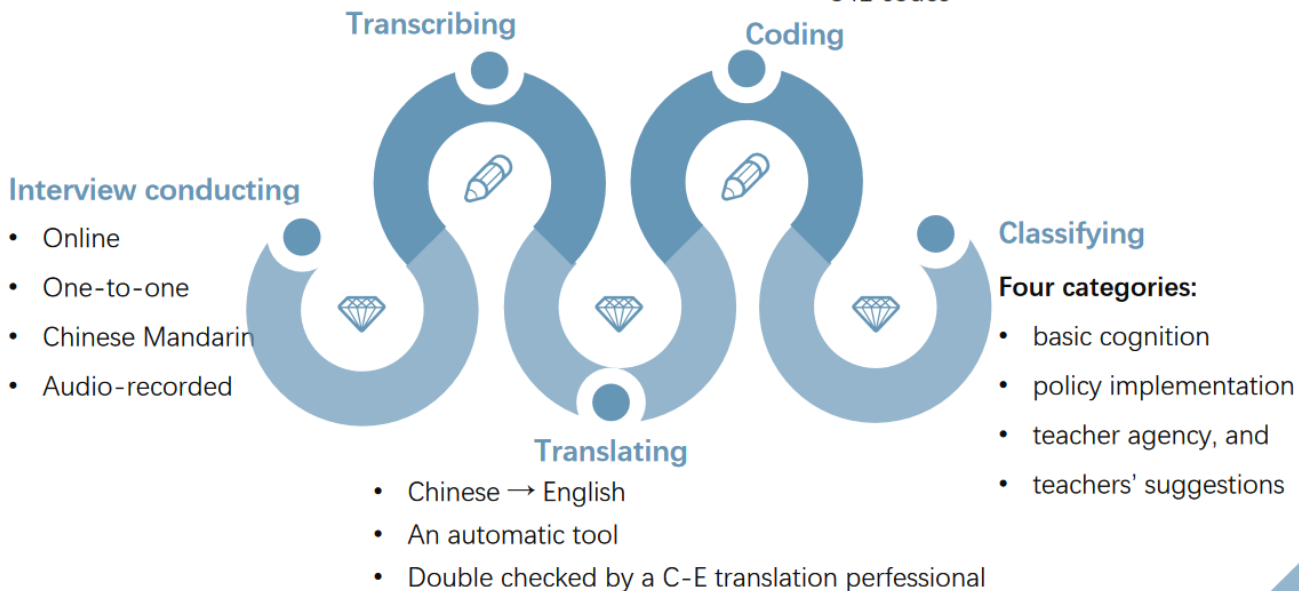
## Instrument

**Semi-structured Interviews:**

- 16 questions for each participants
- lasted 30-60 minutes respectively
- additional questions were asked accordingly

# Data Analysis

- An automatic tool
- Double check and revise
- Transcript organising
- Reading over and coding
- Teaching practice and influencing factors
- 341 codes



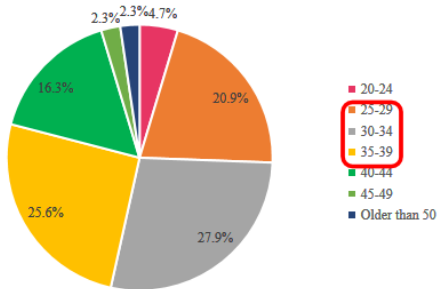


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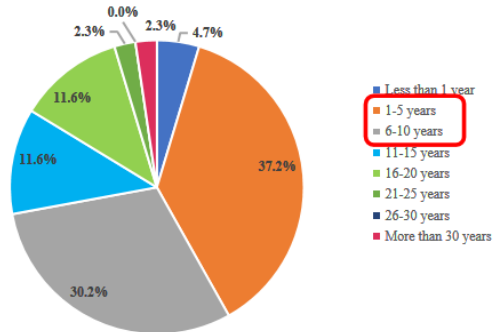
## Results

# Online Survey Results - Basic state of local teachers

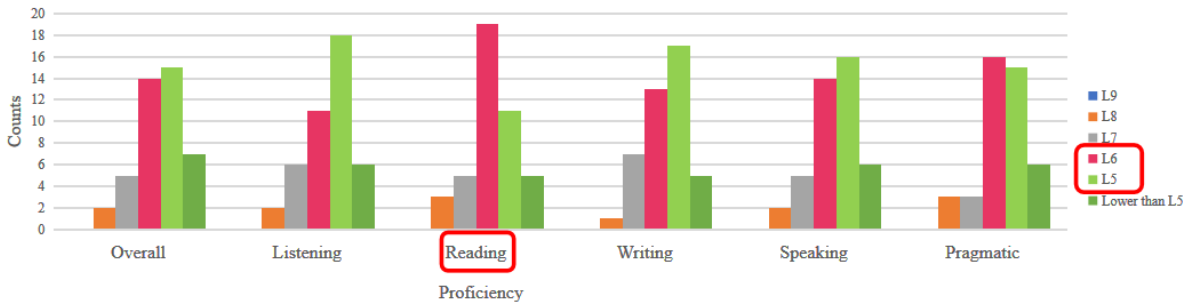
The age groups of the questionnaire survey participants



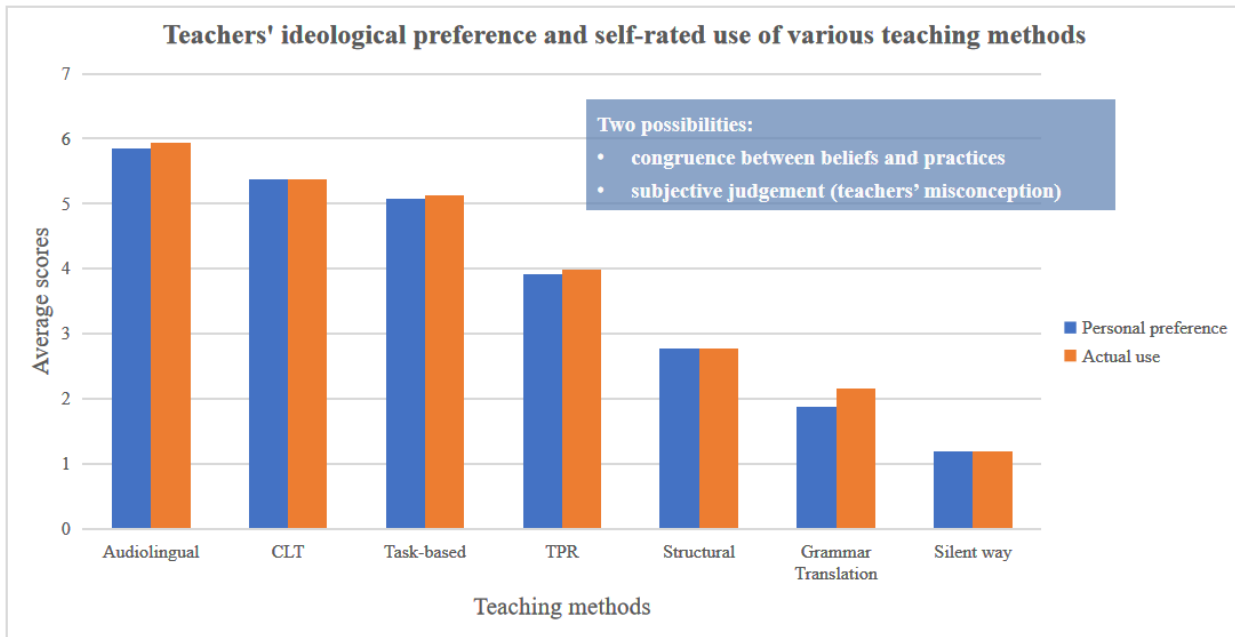
Years of active teaching of the questionnaire survey participants



Teachers' self-evaluation of their English proficiency (CSELA scales)



# Online Survey Results - Teachers' choices of approaches



# Interview Results - Basic cognition & policies implementation

## 1. Most teacher participants knew something about communicative approaches but hadn't formulate a quite clear understanding.

T1: I don't know much about it, but taken literally, it may need me to communicate more with students.

T2: My understanding might be relatively shallow. I think it is mainly to let children learn to output [language] through speaking.

T4: The communicative method is [...] language awareness and social functions [...] not only the content of language structure [...]. Students regularly work in group activities or pairs [...] [in] a kind of information transmission activity.

T5: The first is creating a situation for students [to learn] the conversation in the textbook [...]. The second is [...] the sublimation out of the textbook, [...] asking the students to communicate and exchange [...] [and] use their own repertoires.

## 2. All interviewees held a positive attitude towards the new alternative, but some teachers considered the difficulty of applying it based on the current situation.

T1: Our teaching approaches are being improved guided by the policies [...] but the 'double reduction' policy functions finitely because of the impact of exam-dominant education.

T2: It is inevitable to face certain difficulties when conducting it in practice.

T4: Although children have distinct bases, their acceptability is strong [...] In the end, the children can adapt [...] they are more willing to use this way to learn and consolidate the practice.

T6: The so-called communicative learning [...] has no actual communicative function. [Some teachers] think it is just asking children in pairs to play one of the roles and read the scripts [...] [but the students] don't extend or improve [...] I cannot assert that the effectiveness is non-exist, but it's at least low. [...] Some teachers' understanding is one-sided and not profound enough, [...] including me.

## Interview Results - Teacher agency & training

**3. Teachers acknowledged that they have a certain flexibility to make adjustment in terms of teaching methods and content selection, but only to a limited extent.**

*T3: We can make a little change [in the textbook] based on the actual situation of students [...] or add [...] filter some content [...] [but] we are not going to make any big changes..*

*T4: Policies had a robust guiding function and teachers' purposes were and should be in line with the primary direction of the national policy. Within this range, teachers are free to take any feasible measures in teaching*

*T5: The teacher agency can be functional but only under the condition that they follow the national curriculum standards. We can choose how to teach, but not what to teach as most things are prescribed in the files.*

*T6: These policy and curriculum standards constrained teachers' practice to some extent.*

**4. All the interview participants had experience in teacher training program(s), and all presented willingness and desire for more and further training activities.**

*T2: First, it [the training project] should certainly be helpful [...] Because our side is still relatively closed, only through these training, we can learn some better experience.*

*T4: Every training session is an opportunity to improve*

*T5: Training is actually an opportunity for teachers to improve [...] If you actually use it, it will have a certain effect [...] This depends entirely on the teacher's personal ability to comprehend, or the personal ability to reflect.*

# Interview Results - Teachers' suggestions

5. Teachers provided several suggestions in light of their understanding, needs and experience, which can be categorised into 3 main respects:

## (1) Teacher development:

T3: [I hope to] give us some **timely training**, new content, [so that] we can stand at the forefront of the trend and learn more.

T4: [Teachers] might be **limited by ability** [...] it still needs time in the exploration.

T5: When facing different students [...] teachers should be aware of **the consideration of students' learning status**.

T6: Teachers must learn to improve all the time, [...] they should **be more flexible with these teaching methods and willing to use them [...]**.

## (2) Language use contexts

T2: I think [...] **language environment** is critical [...] [such as] **the entire environment in which [students] live**, the education level of the **caretakers** and **the people [students] interact with**.

T6: [Students should] listen and speak more **outside of class [...]** only three class sessions for each week were insufficient for language development [...]. **family education** is higher and more important than school.

T3: All I can think of right now is to **give our kids more space and time** [...] to be able to communicate [...] **in the classroom**.

## (3) Language policies & materials

T1: **[Each lesson should set with] a small topic**. For example, to discuss the weather today [...]. [Just give students] simple dialogues and topics, then I can apply the communicative approach better.

T6: English **enlightening work should be started earlier** such as in kindergarten [...] years of preparation ahead [...] will differ greatly from the initial ABC from Grade 3

## Discussion - Local teachers (from online survey)

- a generally young group with developing careers with intermediate to upper-intermediate proficiency levels
- an overall moderate workload (average 8.6-hour-teaching/week )
- a mindset transformation is happening but on different stages



# Discussion - Influencing factors perceived



## Teachers

- teachers' teaching competence and theory familiarity
- teachers' low flexibility and weak agency

## Students

- student's inadequate English proficiency levels
- student's low motivation and autonomy in English learning

## The context and culture

- scarce target language use context
- parent's over-emphasise on test scores
- teachers' honoured and esteemed status in Chinese traditional culture

## The institution and policies

- insufficient weekly class hour arranged and overmuch extra-teaching tasks
- lack of training opportunities for rural teachers
- the exam-oriented assessment system



04

# Conclusion

# Implications



## IMPLICATIONS

The localisation and contextualisation of a teaching approach is necessary and significant

01

02

Teachers' voice in policy making and implementing should be noticed and supported

03

Foreign language education reform needs the involvement of different roles, including parents



# Limitations



**Only subjective  
research  
instruments  
used**



**Limited sample  
size and  
variables**



**Lack of  
generalisation  
regarding the  
large area and  
regional gaps in  
China**

# Expectations



**Classroom  
observation**



**The possibility  
and practicality  
of 'eclecticism'  
in China's FL  
education**



**Studies in  
different areas  
in China and  
other contexts**



**Parents' roles in  
FL pedagogy  
reform and  
policy  
implementation**



Do you have any  
questions or ideas?



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# Thank you!

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