

**Professional Doctorate in Education**

**Exploring Teacher-student Communication in  
English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Classes  
in a Private University in China**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the importance of teacher-student communication in English as a foreign language classes in a private university in China. It outlines the positive impacts of effective teacher-student communication on teaching and learning and reveals the perceived causes and negative impacts of teacher-student classroom communication problems.

The research topic originated from the researcher's personal experiences and her belief in the importance of teacher-student classroom communication. Drawing upon the literature and the researcher's understanding of the researched area, research aims and questions were established which enabled a deep and critical exploration of the research topic. A conceptual framework was developed based on the exploration of the key contexts and concepts. This acted as a guide for this empirical work underpinning the researcher's methodological decisions and capturing an early attempt to suggest a relationship between the concepts and ideas which help to explain teacher-student classroom communication.

Underpinned by the philosophy of social constructivism, a qualitative research approach was adopted to conduct the empirical study. Thirteen participants were interviewed to collect in-depth data. The data was analyzed through a thematic data analysis approach. Key findings include the importance of teacher-student classroom communication in its two core roles—functional (pedagogical) roles and psychological roles. Teacher-student classroom communication is not only a medium to support the completion of academic learning, but also a facilitator to satisfy both teachers' and students' psychological needs. When teacher-student classroom communication can best serve both functional and psychological purposes, it results in the most positive influences on teaching and learning.

Drawing on the findings, the original conceptual framework was refined. The new conceptual framework not only demonstrates how teacher-student classroom communication and the context in which it occurs influence each other, but also illustrates two important functions and positive impacts of effective teacher-student classroom communication on teaching and learning. The importance of teacher-student classroom communication lies its serving both functional and psychological purposes which includes knowledge transmission, giving instructions, asking and answering

questions, assigning tasks, building and maintaining teacher-student relationships, creating a relaxing and active atmosphere, motivating and encouraging students, and helping students build confidence. When these purposes can be served via effective teacher-student classroom communication, knowledge can be better transmitted and received, meanings can be understood, misunderstandings can be reduced, students' engagement and learning attitudes can be improved and mutual trust can be built.

The findings have potential implications for policy and practice in the educational field. For the native English speaker language teachers, strategies such as using simple words and short sentences, slowing speaking speed, and properly using body languages and idioms are underlined as significant ways forward, based on my findings. In addition, taking teacher development courses are also effective ways for native English speaker language teachers to acquire cultural and contextual information. For non-native English speaker language teachers, a student-centered teaching mode which facilitates classroom communication is suggested. The students are advised to improve their English proficiency and raise the awareness of their roles in promoting effective teacher-student classroom communication. For the school leaders and policy-makers, small-sized classes with fewer numbers of students are suggested. Further development activities for staff and policy makers would support greater understanding of the crucial nature of teacher-student classroom communication.

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## **Abbreviations**

CEE	College Entrance Examination
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
HE	Higher Education
NESLT	Native English Speaker Language Teacher(s)
NNESLT	Non-native English Speaker Language Teacher(s)
T-S	Teacher-student

## **Chapter 1 Introduction**

This thesis is the result of a long, struggling, but rewarding journey. It explores teacher-student classroom communication in English language classes, the differences between native and non-native English speaker language teachers in terms of their practices of communication with the students, the perceived causes and negative influences of communication problems, and positive influences of effective teacher-student classroom communication. A reflexive approach permeates this study. A reflexivity journal has been kept throughout the whole process of doing the research. I have adopted this reflexive approach as my social, political, and cultural backgrounds and positioning might hinder me from doing the research objectively (Colaizzi, 1978; Burkitt, 1997; Frank, 1997). The problem of subjectivity of qualitative researches is often raised. Doing the research in a reflexive approach is effective to develop rigor, strengthen validity and enhance the quality and credibility of qualitative researches (Patton, 1999, 2002; Holloway & Freshwater, 2007).

In this first chapter I clarify why the research topic interested me and was selected, my personal experiences and beliefs, the research aims and questions, the definitions of key terms, and the structure of the thesis. I situate the research in my own personal experiences since it is crucial to the final decision about the research topic. Meanwhile, it is essential to present who I am and what I believe which affected the way I conducted this study. Afterwards, the context of this research which includes China's educational system and policies, China's higher education, the private university I work within, and the current situation of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes are briefly set out. The chapter ends with an introduction of the structure of the thesis to provide a clear signpost.

### **1.1 Personal Experiences, Beliefs, and the Development of the Research Topic**

I have an BA degree, acquired in China (majoring in English) and an MBA degree, acquired in U.S.A. before pursuing this doctorate degree in education. At the time of writing this thesis, I have been working in a private university in China for more than sixteen years, teaching Chinese students English language courses, and a bilingual course concerning marketing strategies. Therefore, I am both an English language

teacher and a doctoral researcher. Meanwhile, although I am not a participant, the student participants are or were my students and the experiences and viewpoints they shared might be related to my way of communication in class. In this sense, this practice-based research makes me both an insider and outsider researcher (Hellowell, 2006). In fact, this is a matter of epistemology because the researcher's status as an insider/outsider researcher might have an influence on the knowledge generated both from the participants and the researcher (Griffiths, 1998). Therefore, I reflected on this consistently throughout the whole research process and these reflections will be discussed in Chapter 7.

The concept of communication first aroused my attention in one sentence from Watzlawick, Bavelas and Jackson's work (1967: 49): 'one cannot not communicate'. This sentence succinctly summarizes the importance and essence of communication which triggered my interest in this topic. According to Burgoon, Hunsaker and Dawson (1994), communication is a complex act, but it is inevitable in the world we are living in. People send messages and receive messages in various forms—verbally, nonverbally, intentionally or unintentionally, and consciously or unconsciously. In the information era, communication is made even easier but more complex through the Internet. Communication exists throughout human life. Problems might arise owing to communication failure or miscommunication. The consequences of communication problems can never be underestimated because they might accompany people for a long time or they might even be ever-lasting. The worst situation is that the problems might escalate into big conflicts. On the contrary, the benefits effective communication brings are infinite. This topic seems huge but attractive. I thought that I might work more on this topic to see whether it was worthwhile and meaningful in the field of education. I recalled the experience as a student and as a teacher and memorized the impact deriving from good and poor communication. The more I thought about it, the more I believed that this topic was worth studying.

In schools, most of the time, teachers give lectures and instructions to students, assign tasks and homework, ask and answer questions, discipline the class, and have formal or informal talks with the students. These processes of teaching are all completed through communication. I firmly believe that communication is the key to the successful transmission of knowledge, the completion of teaching tasks and the maintenance of teacher-student/student-student relationship in class. My argument is

supported by Susilo, Sudrajat and Rohman (2021). There are some silent times in schools, but communication might still occur via gestures, postures, and facial expressions. Although there are no words and voices involved, there is nonverbal communication. In addition to teaching and learning, informal talk happens all the time such as the daily greeting, the chat during the breaks, and the gossips among the students or the teachers. In any case, no matter what form of the communication is, it is inseparable from both the teachers' and the students' school life.

Chapter 1.1.1 and 1.1.2 further illustrate how my interest has been gradually and deeply stimulated and why I believe this topic is significant from the perspectives of a student and a teacher.

### **1.1.1 My Identity as a Student**

Chinese people are deeply influenced by Confucianism, which focuses on self-cultivation and morality, claiming that the social virtues includes 'benevolence (ren 仁), filial piety (xiao 孝), propriety (li 礼), and righteousness (yi 义)' (Murray, 2009:373). The legacy of Confucianism teaches us that subordinates should obey seniors, children should obey the elder, and students should obey teachers. The doctrine has been passed down from generation to generation and it still prevails in the current era. Xunzi, who advocated that learning is an ever-lasting process (Lewis, 2018) also stated that if a country wanted to thrive, teachers must be respected and education must be valued. Without this, discipline would be ruined, leading to the destruction of regulations. It is quite apparent that in China, teachers' social status is high, and their receiving respect is commonly agreed. Teachers are considered as authority, and what they say is always considered to be reasonable and trustworthy. Students are taught not to disobey them even if when they have different opinions or they don't think the teachers are correct. This happens naturally in Chinese classrooms. However, with the development and opening-up of the country, this situation is being gradually changed. Nevertheless, compared with their counterparts, Chinese students are still relatively more obedient, self-disciplined, and afraid to challenge their teachers.

When I was a student, I considered myself as an obedient, well-behaved, timid and sensitive child. I had encountered a wide range of teachers from extremely rigid ones to overactive ones, and from warm-hearted ones to totally indifferent ones. Among all my former teachers, there were two who left a deep impression and impact on me.

In a sense, these two stories made me determined to research on the topic of teacher-student communication.

One of them was an English language teacher who was regarded as very responsible, dedicated and conscientious, teaching in a prestigious junior middle school. In China, the convention is that a class meeting will be held with parents invited from time to time, especially after the mid-term and final examinations. Usually the students are not allowed to be present but are waiting anxiously at home for their furious or overjoyed parents. Teachers talk about the students' performance, scores, averages, progress and retrogress. This kind of class meeting is the nightmare of many Chinese students. This English teacher talked with my mother after one class meeting about my school performance and scores. After my mother went back home, her delight could be seen from her facial expression. The English teacher told her that I worked very hard and made quite much progress not only in English, but in other subjects such as mathematics and chemistry as well. The progress was owing to my hard work and my mother's description was 'as a stupid bird, you flew earlier than others, so it worked miracles'. When I did poorly in mathematics, physics, chemistry or biology, my English teacher would repeat the saying 'stupid birds should fly earlier'. When I recall this experience now as a teacher, I exactly understand that the English teacher didn't mean to hurt or humiliate me but instead, he wanted to stimulate and encourage me to work harder. A student poor at Science was considered as being not clever. When a not-clever child did well, he/she must work extremely hard to get there. The words 'this stupid bird flew earlier than others' were compliments instead of insults since the hard work was noticed and acknowledged. However, I was labelled as a stupid bird ever since then both in the school and at home. My parents believed every word said by the teachers because teachers were so knowledgeable that they would never be wrong. The English teacher's communication skills were so poor that negative impact was caused. He could have encouraged me by saying 'you work really hard and you deserve the good scores', but he did not. He encouraged me by an unintentional insult, which kept me company for rather a long time. When asked why I chose this research topic, I keep retelling this story because I hope teachers realize that their intentional or unintentional words might have positive or negative impacts on students and these impacts might be lifelong. In addition to transmitting knowledge, classroom communication has other functions such as enlightening and encouraging students, which are important as well (Mazer, 2013).



When recommended 'communication' as a research topic, the memories and experiences of the communication between my teachers and me immediately and vividly emerged. Now, I have already become an experienced teacher. However, when my paper and ideas are commented as 'brilliant' or 'fantastic' by the supervisors, I am not sure whether they are being polite or they are praising me. The shadow of being labelled as 'a stupid bird' has made me unconfident and with self-doubt. I have never expected a teacher's words could have such a deep and long impact on me.

However, my experiences were not always unpleasant. I had encountered another language teacher who taught Japanese in a university. This language teacher always asked students to answer questions and read texts one by one. Every time she asked me to read a paragraph of a text, off and on, she nodded and murmured something as if she was enjoying my reading. After I finished reading, she would always give detailed compliment and encouragement such as 'the tone is really good', or 'keep practicing and you will definitely speak like a native'. I knew I was not that good but her comments were so concrete and convincing and powerful that I became more confident. I later noticed that she did that to every student in her class. When we failed to pronounce a complex word, she was always ready to help. When we made mistakes, she pointed them out, not in a frightening tone, but very objective and always followed by an encouragement such as 'since it's corrected, I'm sure you will do it better next time'. Students worked harder not to disappoint her the next time. Once I didn't do well in a test, I felt ashamed. She asked me to stand by her side and checked the test paper together with me. I told her that I didn't understand one grammatical point. Therefore, I made mistakes on each question concerning that point. She reviewed my mistakes carefully and blamed herself for failing to explain that difficult point clearly and she forgot to check students' understanding. In the next class, she apologized for her negligence, explained the grammatical point again, and gave us exercise to enhance the understanding. A teacher blaming herself for students' not doing well in a test is a legend. I have never encountered a teacher like her throughout the 20-odd years as a student. She was a teacher who paid attention to both transmitting knowledge and building love and trust via classroom communication. She was also very careful of the wording because she talked in an encouraging way and avoided offensive words. I remember the class atmosphere was always friendly, relaxing and comfortable. The classroom communication ran smoothly and the students were willing and happy to

communicate with her without being afraid of harsh criticism. Most of us were active, engaged and academically curious in her class. The great influence she left on me still works today when I've been a teacher myself for more than 16 years. When my students are reading a paragraph, I nod and murmur 'good' from time to time unconsciously just as what the Japanese language teacher did. One of my students told me once that she was not nervous any more when I did this because she truly believed that I was there to support her instead of being picky. The positive influence can also be ever-lasting as well. That is the precious legacy and the power of a teacher's words.

From a student's perspective, what many teachers appear to be interested in the pedagogy, the professional title, and the students' scores, or they are just doing the job carefully or indifferently. Teacher-student communication and its impact might not be a concern to them. Its main function is a tool to transmit knowledge. They seem to have no obligation to pay attention to the wording. What they say cannot be challenged, and for the sake of the students. This can be attributed to the influences of Confucianism which emphasizes the authority of teachers and the hierarchical status in school, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2. Years later, when I entered the university, the situation seemed better. On one hand, the university teachers might consider the students as adults so that the communication is relatively on equal terms. On the other hand, different from elementary and high schools, university teachers are usually responsible for the courses only and the class tutors are responsible for students' discipline, punishment and rewards. With no stress of the university entrance examination, scores are no more the only focus so that the teachers' supervision is less intense. Therefore, the teacher-student communication is relatively less than that in the junior and senior schools.

The above two examples of my experiences demonstrate the importance and its influences on me as a student. They prompted the choice of the research topic because I firmly believe that teacher-student communication plays a significant role in both teaching and learning. The significance of teacher-student communication in class not only lies in transmitting knowledge, but also lies in more aspects such as motivating students, helping students build confidence, and maintaining a positive teacher-student relationship.

### **1.1.2 My Identity as a Teacher**

Although I had unhappy experiences when I was a student, there were also warm-hearted, inspiring and insightful teachers who enlightened my school life. After I graduated from the university, I myself became an English language teacher. Due to my own experiences, I pay great attention to teacher-student classroom communication. I am very cautious and careful of the wording when communicating with the students. My identity has changed while my attitudes towards the teachers' communication with the students remain the same. No matter how old the students are, wording must be taken into consideration. What has been said cannot be unsaid. The impacts of a teacher's words cannot be easily predicted. This doesn't mean that the teachers should overreact by talking with extreme caution and humbleness, but means avoiding words that are hurtful and insulting. The students can sense if the teachers talk to them equally and politely. There were students who talked about a teacher labeling them as 'students from this not-prestigious university'. There were students who complained that one of their teachers talked about students' desire to pass the College English Test Band 4 in an ironic way. I watched the students speak in a fury. As my identity changed, I could understand these two teachers. Probably they didn't mean to hurt the students or they might even want to say the words to stimulate students to work harder. However, they had neglected to consider the importance of communication skills. They could have talked in a tactful way so that the students could be encouraged instead of being discouraged. These kinds of stories happen repeatedly in the university I work within.

As I've experienced and heard a lot about both good and bad examples of teacher-student communication, eventually I have decided to do the research on this topic for it is worthwhile to appeal to the awareness of the importance of teacher-student classroom communication. The importance of teacher-student classroom communication, the perceived causes and negative impacts of classroom communication problems, and the positive impacts of effective communication in class deserve more attention and exploration. In addition, recalling the experiences of studying in America and Britain, I've been deeply impressed by American and British teachers' different communication styles from my former Chinese teachers. This has stimulated my interest in exploring the differences between native and non-native English speaker language teachers in terms of their practices of classroom communication with the students.

## **1.2 The Aims of the Research**

As clarified in the personal experience section, although teachers' communication with the students counts for much, I've noticed that it is often neglected. Communication problems might hinder teaching while effective classroom communication might facilitate teaching and learning. How teachers and students communicate in class not only affects teaching and learning, but also greatly affects students' inner feelings and emotions as well (Fashiku, 2017). This is even more important in a second language classroom when the students are experiencing the class not in their first language. Misunderstandings occur more easily. However, this is my personal educational belief. I wish to find out what really happens in the classroom in terms of teacher-student communication, people's viewpoints and attitudes towards the importance and roles of classroom communication between teachers and students, the degree to which my beliefs are reflected in the wider population, and whether my beliefs are consistent with the theories and the participants' beliefs in a scientific, rigorous and rational way.

My research aim is to explore teacher-student communication in English as a foreign language (EFL) classes in a private university in China. I also wish to explore the perceived causes and negative influences of communication problems, the differences between native and non-native English speaker language teachers concerning classroom communication, and the positive influences teacher-student classroom communication bring to teaching and learning. Through this process of exploration, I wish to both build theoretical knowledge and explore practical implications via synthesizing the data and raising educators' and teachers' awareness of the significant and important role teacher-student classroom communication plays in teaching and learning.

## **1.3 Research Questions**

Drawing upon the literature, research questions stem from the specific research aims. The general research aims are converted into concrete questions so that the research is operationalized (Hartman, 2006). Research questions address and align with the aims of the research, and reach the core of research issues (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2017). I take White (2009), Barroga and Matanguihan's (2022) suggestion that research questions are so important that they must be realistic, logical, researchable,

and answerable to yield warranted answers deriving from the collected data and facilitate the understanding of the research topic, scope and focus.

The research questions for this particular study have been developed based on my research aims and focuses, and my literature review. My research questions seek for answers by asking ‘what’ and they are open-ended questions so as to enable the participants freely share their stories, experiences, attitudes and viewpoints of teacher-student classroom communication. The research questions have been continually refined, modified, and examined as my understanding of the researched issues develops during the research process (Creswell, 2007; Agee, 2009). When developing the research questions, I have kept reflecting on how the questions might affect the teacher and student participants’ work and study because potential ethical issues of the research questions are easily neglected (Flick, 2006). I have taken it into account that the research questions can better serve the research aims and meanwhile they are not intrusive to the participants’ privacies.

I used the following four research questions to enable me to meet my research aims:

- 1) What is the importance of teacher-student classroom communication?
- 2) What are the differences between native and non-native English speaker language teachers in terms of their practices of classroom communication?
- 3) What are the perceived causes and negative impacts of classroom communication problems or failures on teaching and learning?
- 4) What are the positive impacts of effective teacher-student communication on teaching and learning?

The first broadly framed question functions as an overall roadmap guiding the right direction and allowing me to capture and stick to the aims of the research (Janesick, 2000) while the other three questions allow me to focus on capturing and interpreting the evidence needed to answer the overarching question. They are interrelated and supportive to each other.

I used these questions to facilitate the development of the interview questions, and prompt new questions and sub-questions at the data collection stage (Agee, 2009) to encourage the participants to talk more and deeply so that rich and valid data can be generated.

## 1.4 Defining Key Terms

There are a number of terms emerging from the above discussion. In order to avoid misunderstandings and ambiguity, and make the research more understandable to the readers, defining and explaining these terms is essential. Moreover, the terms function as a thread, interconnecting the entire research. Therefore, the terms will be defined and explained briefly in this part, but might be discussed later in more detail when it is necessary.

**English Language Classes:** In China's universities, English is a compulsory course for students from all majors and it is known as English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Basically, this course might include English speaking, writing, listening, reading and translation. In the university I work within, which is the context of the research, the subject is divided into two courses—integrated English taught by non-native English speaker language teachers, and listening and speaking taught by native English speaker language teachers. Non-English major students must take these two kinds of courses in the first year.

**Native English Speaker Language Teachers:** Following the above explanation of the English language class, there are two groups of teachers responsible for the two different courses. One group is the native English speakers, usually called the foreign teachers, teaching the listening and speaking course. Native English speaker language teachers means those teachers whose first language is English (Chomsky, 1965). Immigrants and emigrants whose first language is English are also included.

**Non-native English Speaker Language Teachers:** In contrast to native English speaker language teachers, non-native English speaker language teachers refer to those whose first language is not English (Chomsky, 1965; Braine, 2010). This group of teachers are generally called Chinese teachers. They are responsible for the integrated English language course, which deals with grammar, vocabulary, speaking, listening, reading skills, writing skills, translation, and national English tests such as College English Test. In other words, the course they teach includes all aspects concerning English language whereas, listening and speaking are not their focuses since this is the foreign teachers' domain.

**Communication:** This is the most difficult concept to be defined as Lin (1972: 3) stated that defining communication is a problem as complex and old and 'civilization'. I selected the following arguments which I believe are persuasive. Burgoon, Hunsaker

and Dawson (1994: 19) point out that communication could be defined in a ‘source-oriented’ way placing emphasis on the source which purposefully sends a ‘stimulus’ in order to prompt a response while a ‘receiver-oriented’ definition emphasizes on the receivers’ responses to a stimulus. Burgoon, Hunsaker and Dawson (1994: 31) later clarify their own definition by stating that there are ‘shared codes of verbal and nonverbal symbols’ involved in the process of communication and the meanings implied in the symbols are dependent on the people and the people’s interpretations who use them. Extending this viewpoint, Silverstein (1974) notes that communication indicates not only verbal languages, but also something occurring during the process of interactions. Lastly, according to Devito (1997: 7), communication refers to the act that one or more people send and receive messages and expect or give feedback and responses accordingly. In the process, these messages might be distorted or misinterpreted in different situations because of noises. The word ‘noise’ means disturbance, obstacles, barriers, or interference that allow the distortion of the meanings of messages and information or bring about distracting information (Turk, 1985; Rai & Rai, 2019).

**Teacher-student Classroom Communication:** In this thesis, I am using teacher-student classroom communication to indicate the face-to-face speech communication between teachers and students to ensure teaching and learning in the classroom context (Yusof & Halim, 2014). It includes content related and non-content related communication.

**Content Related Classroom Communication:** Content related classroom communication refers to its function as directly serving the pedagogical purposes such as transmitting knowledge, explaining content, assigning tasks, giving instructions, and asking and answering questions (Frymier & Houser, 2000; Farrell, 2009; Fashiku, 2017; Tang, 2017).

**Non-content Related Classroom Communication:** Contrary to content related classroom communication, non-content related classroom communication indicates its function as serving psychological, emotional and relational purposes such as building teacher-student relationship and creating a comfortable classroom atmosphere via greeting, encouragement, compliment, feedback, and comments (Frymier & Houser, 2000).

**Classroom Communication Problems:** Classroom communication problems involve a wide range of situations such as misunderstandings, misinterpretations of meanings, failure in understanding instructions, questions, content, or meanings, the use of improper and offensive words (thus causing negative impacts), failure in sending or receiving messages, and getting no feedback or responses (Sidelinger, Nyeste, Madlock, Pollak & Wilkinson, 2015).

**Effective Classroom Communication:** In an educational context, for teachers, effective classroom communication with the students means the teachers are able to transmit knowledge in an effective and efficient way, explain content clearly, keep the students well informed, give clear and understandable instructions, give timely comments and feedback, and interact with the students properly (Polk, 2006). For students, effective communication with the teachers means being able to receive messages and knowledge transmitted by teachers, ask and answer questions, give feedback, interact with teachers properly (Black, 2005). Classroom communication is effective when it facilitates teaching and learning (Fashiku, 2017), and when it is able to serve both pedagogical and psychological purposes in class (Dhillon & Kaur, 2021).

## **1.5 An Introduction to the Context of the Research**

Following the brief clarification of some key terms, I then provide an introduction to the context of the research which includes the concept of Higher Education, Higher Education (HE) system in China, the private university in which the research was conducted, and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes in China. Knowing about the context facilitates a better understanding of what happens in such a context concerning the practices of teacher-student classroom communication.

### **1.5.1 The Concept of Higher Education**

Introducing China's Higher Education is never easy because of its long and complex historical background (Tian & Liu, 2019). It might be helpful to clarify the concept of HE first. I accept Barnett's persuasive argument (1990) that Higher Education as a process of thinking critically about previously possessed knowledge which enables a person to see the knowledge in a larger context. According to him, HE does not only mean the 'university' and these are two different but inseparably related concepts. He states that HE is a 'critical concept' which might not be found in



universities and this concept provides criteria to assess the educational process of universities—whether they reach the criteria indicated in the ‘idea of higher education’ (Barnett, 2010; 2011: 2, 3). Extending Barnett’s argument, Johansson and Felten (2014: 2) claim that by receiving higher education, students must be helped to develop in all aspects and make changes in themselves to become better, and this process of transformation should be understood by students. In so doing, students will be able to well prepare for the lifelong change and development, leading to ultimate flourishing after graduation. Although there are multiple ways of understanding the complex concept of the university (White, 1997), they are all reasonable and sensible because this is a multi-faceted concept.

My critique of the concept of HE given above is that focus should be transferred to the cultivation of learning abilities and the development of students’ personal qualities and social skills. Supported by what has been learned from the literature, I contend that HE should not only serve academic purposes such as transmitting knowledge, but also provide a platform to help students mentally and psychologically prepare for integrating into society and living independently after graduation. Teacher-student classroom communication plays an important role in achieving this aim via its different functions.

### **1.5.2 The Higher Education System in China**

Prior to the further discussion of the Higher Education system in China, an introduction to the whole process of education in China is useful to a better understanding. In general, from 1986 onwards, Chinese children start schooling when they reach the age of 6. Six years of elementary school and three-year junior middle school make up the nine years of compulsory education. After that, students either enter the three-year senior high schools or the equivalent vocational schools. Usually, senior high school graduates apply for their ideal universities according to the scores of college entrance examination (CEE). Accordingly, based on students’ CEE scores, universities select ideal students (Dai, Cai & Zhu, 2021).

The Higher Education system in China has a long and complex history. In ancient times, there was no institution which could be called a university but private academies. Learners had to take ‘imperial examination’ so as to be selected as scholars.

It was known as the Ancient Chinese Higher Education system (Hayhoe, 1996; Yang, 2011: 343; Hartley & Jarvis, 2021). According to Yang (2011), even in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the HE system in China still lays emphasis on knowledge on the basis of Confucian values. Confucian values penetrate into every aspect of China's education, including higher education as well due to its long existence in history. The influence of Confucianism is so deeply rooted that it cannot and will not be thoroughly discarded or eliminated no matter whether the influence is positive or negative. Gu (2012: 514) points out that the establishment of China's modern education was 'relatively recent' and China established the first modern university in 1895 (Qiang, 1996). The Higher Education system in China has been always under the control of government (Wang & Liu, 2011). The year 1978 was the first turning point to the HE system in China with the coming of the educational reform policy (Qiang, 1996; Wang & Liu, 2011; Gu, 2012; McKeown, 2021). The reform policy prompted the modernization and internationalization of the Higher Education system in China and that was a start. In 1990s, the expansion of China's HE was another turning point (Qiang, 1996; Wan, 2006; Wu & Zhao, 2010; Gu, 2012; Postiglione, 2020; McKeown, 2021). According to Gu (2012: 514), the expansion of China's HE started with the 'implementation of the education reform policy in 1978' while the real expansion happened after 1999. In the past, those who were eligible to further study in universities took up a relatively small portion of the entire population. However, the expansion turned elite higher education to mass higher education, which allows more and more high school graduates to be accepted by universities. A 47% increase was announced by the Ministry of Education (Wan, 2006; Wu & Zhao, 2010). On the basis of enrollment data, Gu (2012: 515) points out that the 'average growth rate of China's HE was 7.41% from 1978 to 1998, while it became 19.78% from 1998 to 2008'. Moreover, Postiglione (2020: 924) further illustrates that there were '8.7 million graduated with a bachelor's degree' in 2020 in China. During the HE expansion years, private institutions began to flourish as well (Wang & Liu, 2011). According to Wang and Liu, there were 20 private HE institutions in 1997. The number increased to 278 in 2008 (Wang & Liu, 2011: 217). The university I've been working within is one of the private higher education institutions which develops within the background of the Higher Education system in China. As the research was conducted in this private

university, and all the participants were from this university, the background information will be provided in the next part.

### **1.5.3 The Private University I Work within**

The university I work within is a private university, established in 1992, which is the key context of the research. I work within this university as a teacher, therefore, it is the most feasible and efficient place to conduct the research. I'm not identifying the name of the university nor giving details which would enable others to identify it as this would be unethical. Instead, I'm clarifying the specific research context.

As is stated by Wang and Liu (2011), private universities usually receive little funding from the public or the government and therefore they heavily depend on students' tuition fees. As a result, the administration is not as centralized by the government as the public universities. In 1995, the '211' project was introduced by the government and in 1999, another '985' project was launched afterwards (Postiglione, 2020; Hartley & Jarvis, 2021). The '211' and '985' universities are regarded as the first tier in the Higher Education system in China. Other public universities are ranked as the second-tier ones. Private universities are regarded as less prestigious so that they are ranked behind both tier one and tier two universities, which is different from western countries such as America where private universities, Princeton University for example, might also rank highly. Therefore, it is true that students' academic level is relatively lower than that of public universities (Wang & Liu, 2011).

The private university I work within is relatively prestigious among private universities in Shanghai, but is still considered lower-tier compared with public universities. It aims at cultivating students with practical skills. English language proficiency and Computer skills are two specialties and focuses of the university. Currently (to 2021), there are 13 schools, 40 majors, 640 teachers, and 1,4000 full-time undergraduates. Besides these 640 teachers, there are also part-time teachers from other public and private universities. Newly-recruited teachers are assigned teaching tasks immediately without a period of time for them to observe experienced teachers' classes, or to learn how to teach. In this university, teachers are responsible for academic affairs such as teaching courses, scoring the examination papers, tutoring the seniors' papers, and doing research. There are a small portion of teachers who have administrative work as well. Generally, about 200 students are assigned to one tutor, who is mainly

responsible for non-academic affairs such as students' registration, discipline, school notices, campus life, contacting parents, prize awarding, and punishment for violating school regulations. When I teach, the communication with the students is usually face-to-face in the classroom, except for the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown periods when classes were taught online and the teacher-student communication was via the Internet tool such as Zoom and Tencent Meeting. After class, I talk to the students face-to-face or via chatting tools online only if they are absent from class or there are affairs concerning teaching and learning, and students communicate with me for the same reason. There are cases that students talk with me for non-academic reasons such as the course, learning, or scores but for suggestions on the emotional or life problems they encounter. But this kind of communication doesn't often occur. In a word, I seldom come to students for a talk and they seldom do that as well. Three reasons explain why I don't frequently communicate with students after class. Firstly, I don't want to interfere since they are adult students. Secondly, I believe that if students need help or they want to talk, they will contact me and that's what I have kept telling them to do. Thirdly, I'm a university teacher rather than a tutor, it is not my responsibility and it's not suitable for me to frequently approach students to have a talk. People are required to stay in their position and do their jobs. This indicates that I have limited chances to communicate with the students after class in this university. Under this circumstance, teacher-student in-class communication seems significantly important because this is a platform and an opportunity to transmit knowledge, exchange ideas, build relationships and mutual trust, and share experiences.

This is the specific background information of where the research was conducted. All the participants were from this university, ranging from 18 and the above. The interviews were conducted in this university as well.

In the next section, I move on to discuss EFL classes in China and in the university I work within since the research studies teacher-student communication in English as a foreign language classes.

#### **1.5.4 English as a Foreign Language Classes**

With the rapid development and progress of globalization and internationalization, English has become a global language, leading to its being used and spoken not only by English-speaking countries but also by the whole world (Wei,

2016; Gao & Zheng, 2019; Liu, Zhang & Fang, 2021). Consequently, English language proficiency has become a central concern (Zhang & Watkins, 2007; Hu & McGrath, 2011), and the demand for university graduates with foreign language competence keeps rising in China (Zhang & Watkins, 2007). Proficiency in English language has gained high status in China and it has become an indispensable skill for different purposes in different aspects such as job hunting, career development, and international cooperation (Wang & Gao, 2008; Gao, Barkhuizen & Chow, 2011; Liu, Zhang & Fang, 2021). A wide range of researchers (Crystal, 2008; He & Li, 2010; Gao, Barkhuizen & Chow, 2011; Wei, 2016; Gao & Zheng, 2019) contend that China has probably a large and even the largest number of English language learners compared with other non-English speaking countries. In fact, English language is a compulsory course in elementary school, junior middle school, senior high school and university (Liu, Mishan & Chambers, 2021; Liu, Zhang & Fang, 2021).

In the university I work within, since English language is one of the specialties, it is highly valued. Regardless of the majors, all non-English-major first-year students are required to take two English courses. There are about 3000 first-year students who must take at least two compulsory English language courses, 20 full-time non-native English speaker language teachers (NNEFLT), 14 part-time native English speaker language teachers (NEFLT), and 10 full-time native English speaker language teachers. All the first-year students, excluding Art majors and foreign language majors, must take a pre-English-test to be assigned to English Level A Class or English Level B Class according to their test scores. The class size range from about 15 to 55 students and the average size is 30 students. This class scale is relatively small-sized compared with the average college English class size of more than 80 students in China in 2005 (Liu, Mishan & Chambers, 2018). The class sizes vary in different universities in recent years but the large class size of EFL classes remains a common problem (Shi, Delahunty & Gao, 2019). When students take the two English courses, they must follow the class schedule of their assigned classes. All the students, except Art majors use the same textbook. Teachers follow the same syllabus. All Level A classes take the exactly same exams at the same time and it's the same to all Level B classes. In addition, the criteria of students' assessment are decided by the school and teachers assess students according to the same criteria. The class time duration is 90 minutes. There are two classes in each week. This is the current situation of EFL courses, classes, and teaching

in the university in the university I work within, which is worthwhile to be clarified since the teacher-student communication is studied in the context of EFL classes.

From the above discussion, three points are worth exploring further. Firstly, because of the expansion of the enrolment of higher education, the EFL teacher-student ratio was 1: 200 in China in 2006 (Zhang, 2006; Hu & McGrath, 2011). However, in the university I work within, the ratio is about 11: 750 in 2021 (44 teachers; 3000 first-year students). Teacher-student ratio in each separate class ranges from 1: 15 to 1: 55, with the average ratio of 1: 30 (1 teacher; student number ranges from about 15 to 55). With such a teacher-student ratio, adequate time for communication cannot be guaranteed. According to my teaching experience, in order to complete the assigned teaching tasks by the school, a great portion of teacher-communication has to be spent on knowledge transmission. Even when there is time for a topic-related talk in class, it is not possible that every student has the chance to speak since the student number is large. Even if not taking teaching tasks for consideration, in a 30-student-class, the average communication time for each student is only three minutes, which is still inadequate. However, the real situation is that teachers have to complete teaching tasks assigned by the department and the time left for classroom communication with the students is so limited that there are quite a number of students, especially the introverted and quiet ones who don't really have a chance to communicate with their teachers in class. Secondly, as discussed in the above section, the Confucian heritage which lays emphasis on hierarchical status affects teacher-student communication (Hu, 2013; Liu, Mishan & Chambers, 2018). The effect works in EFL classes as well regardless of the nature of courses. Students must respect teachers for two reasons. On one hand, teachers are regarded as authority with a higher status than students since they are knowledgeable and elder. On the other hand, teachers must be respected by students since they receive knowledge from their wise teachers. Respecting teachers mean respecting wisdom and respecting knowledge transmitters (Watkins & Biggs, 2001; Nisbett, 2003; Hu, 2013; Liu, Mishan & Chambers, 2018). Influenced by this concept since childhood, teacher-student communication is based on the obedience of students. Lastly, another influence of Confucianism is that teacher-centered lecture mode teaching style which allows little argumentation still prevails (Yang, 2011). With teachers talking all the time, students are lack of the chances sharing ideas and raising questions, which I argue that this kind of teacher-student communication is directional

rather than interactive. This will be further discussed in Chapter 2 since it is particularly important and relevant to this study.

The key points raised in the above discussion give a clear agenda for the research. This lack of communication appears to be a barrier to effective teaching. And more issues such as why and how effective teacher-student communication influences teaching and learning, and what factors might promote or hinder teacher-student communication will be studied.

## **1.6 The Structure of the Thesis**

This thesis consists of seven chapters. It starts from a chapter of introduction. In this chapter, my personal experiences and professional status are presented to explain why this topic has been selected, how my interest has developed, and why I have considered it as a significant topic to be researched and discussed. Furthermore, the research aims and questions are presented, and key terms are defined to avoid misunderstandings and misinterpretations. The chapter ends with a brief introduction of the context of the research. This chapter functions as a signpost, providing the basic information so as to enable the readers to know about what will be studied, covered and discussed.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature in the researched field. In this chapter, Confucian philosophy is explained and its influences on the Chinese, education, teachers' educational beliefs, and teacher-student classroom communication are critically evaluated. I then critique the literature on the theories and key concepts underpinning the research and facilitating my understanding of the research field. These core theories and concepts include communication, teacher-student classroom communication, the problems of teacher-student classroom communication in China and in EFL classes, and teachers' roles in a classroom setting. A conceptual framework derived from the study of literature forms the last section, illustrating my beliefs prior to undertaking the research about teacher-student classroom communication and how they are linked together. The conceptual framework guides this empirical study.

In the third methodology chapter, I clarify my philosophical stance and my personal beliefs. Ontological and epistemological concerns, and how the philosophical stances support how the research was conducted are illustrated. Furthermore, how this affects the way I conducted the research and the choice of the research method is

explained. Then the research design is discussed in detail including the justification of methodology, my decision of the research method, the experiences gained from the pilot studies, designing interview questions and types, the rationale of my choice of a thematic analysis approach, sampling strategies, and ethical concerns.

Chapter 4 discusses the process of collecting and analyzing data. I illustrate how I recruited and interviewed the participants, and how the data was stored. The challenges of transcription and translation are discussed as well. Then I clarify the goals of analyzing qualitative data, describe the important steps of thematic analysis, and provide examples of how I analyzed the data via this method.

I then report the findings in Chapter 5 with tables, figures and participants' excerpts and quotes presented. Themes are discussed in detail in this chapter.

Chapter 6 discusses what I have found as against my original research aim and questions, synthesizes the findings, revisits and reorganizes the conceptual framework, discusses the limitations of the research, and put forward the possibilities of further studies.

In the last Chapter, I discuss the contribution of the research to knowledge and put forward potential implications for policy and practice from different perspectives. I also have a final reflection on the whole research process in this chapter. I scrutinize how my identities influence the way I conducted the research and review my educational belief and the impact of the research on me.

## **A Summary of the Chapter**

In this chapter, I have explained why the research topic has been selected, presented the research aims and questions, defined important terms, introduced the background information, and presented the structure of the thesis. In Chapter 2, I move on to consider the key concept of Confucianism before exploring other concepts central to the research. Additionally, the conceptual framework deriving from my study of the literature will be presented.



## **Chapter 2 Literature Review**

This chapter critically examines the key concepts which inform my work. Accepting Cohen, Manion and Morrison's (2017) argument for the importance of understanding the context of the research, I begin with a critical evaluation of the impact of Confucianism on teacher-student classroom communication in Chinese classes, teachers' and students' educational beliefs, educational policy and practice in China. In this chapter, the background information of China's greatest sage Confucius, his educational theories, and the impacts of the theories on Chinese people and education are discussed in detail. I then probe deeper into the main concepts relevant to this research exploring the relationship between classroom communication and learning which will illuminate my research focus for me. These concepts include the aims of education, communication, and the roles of a teacher in a classroom setting. In addition, teacher-student classroom communication and the problems in Chinese and EFL classes, a key concept in the research interconnecting the entire research are discussed in detail in this chapter. An analysis of the ideas, theories and concepts deriving from the literature leads to the conceptual framework which will be presented to guide my research design and approach.

### **2.1 A Critical Discussion of the Impact of Confucianism on Chinese People's Educational Beliefs, Policy and Practice**

Confucianism plays a huge role in every aspect of Chinese society, ranging from politics, economics, ethics, culture, social norms, human behaviors, and also education (Lee, Jones, Ames & Hershock, 2017; Park & Chesla, 2007; Shim, 2008; Basharat, Iqbal & Bibi, 2011; Chuang, 2012; Murray, 2012; Wang, 2014; Li, 2017; Mang, 2018; Zhao, 2020). Confucian theories, educational concepts and the most famous analects influence not only China, but also other Asian countries such as Korea, Vietnam, and Japan, forming a 'Confucian cultural sphere' (Lee, Jones, Ames & Hershock, 2017: 1). Confucius, once an educator, philosopher and politician, is called the sage in China, and his wisdom and fame is recognized throughout the whole world (Sun, 2008). Although more than 2500 years have passed, his teachings still occupy an indispensable and unique place in China, especially in the educational field (Sun, 2008). As Sun (2008:

561) summarizes, Confucius's four innovations have an ever-lasting impact on Chinese civilization—

(1) The creation of the role of the private teacher and the idea and practice of lifelong learning; (2) The creation and establishment of the content of education, its methods, and the ideals; (3) The broad application of liberal arts learning; (4) the acceptance of students of all social backgrounds, with clearly established principles for doing so.

Sun (2008: 561)

The importance and value of Confucianism cannot be neglected or discarded in the current educational system (Yang, 2011). It also affects the ways in which Chinese people communicate and interact both in class and in Chinese people's daily life. Therefore, Confucianism and its philosophy is one of the key ideas I critique here as in this discussion of contextual considerations, it affected both the design of my study, and the whole research process.

### **2.1.1 The Main Elements of Confucian Philosophy**

The Confucian philosophy basically consists of 'a set of ethical ideas oriented toward practice' (Park & Chesla, 2007: 297). The teachings of Confucius which were contained in the Analects (Lun Yu) are the core of Confucianism (Park & Chesla, 2007). Confucius's educational thoughts, ideas and beliefs were coherently constructed and recorded in this book, which were considered as valuable legacy by the Chinese people (Wang, 2014).

Confucianism emphasizes five basic virtues that function as norms of all individual behaviors: *Ren* (仁) (benevolence), *Yi* (义) (integrity; uprightness; righteousness), *Li* (礼) (rite; propriety), *Chi* (智) (moral understanding; wisdom), and *Shin* (信) (trust; fidelity) (Cua, 2000; Wang, 2014; Zhao, 2018). *Ren* (benevolence) is the 'ideological core of Confucianism' (Zhong, 2016: 1), 'representing ideologies and moral concepts' (Zhao, 2011: 4). *Ren* (benevolence) means that a person should help other people without asking for repayment, be concerned for the well-being of people (Billington, 1997; Cua, 2000, Park & Chesla, 2007; Hu, Xing, Fan & Zhu, 2021), and love people (Confucius, 1983). It is also regarded a required quality of a human being (Ni, 2002). *Yi* (integrity, uprightness, righteousness) puts emphasis on the righteous

actions and intention, rational thinking and proper conduct in society (Cua, 2000). When one has the temptation to do something evil or when one is facing difficulties and adversity, *Yi* tells people what is the right thing to do. *Li* (rite and propriety) is a wider concept and it is translated in different ways (Radice, 2017). Park and Chesla (2007: 301) state that *Li* values moral qualities of human beings, sets up the boundaries for appropriate behaviors, stimulates people's desire for behaving in a moral way, and encourages people to develop noble characters that are able to display the refinement in culture and civilization. In addition, *Li* also emphasizes the social status and 'the hierarchy structure' (Zhao, 2018: 322). It tells people to be loyal and respectful to their elders and to those who enjoy a higher social status. It also provides norms and suggests examples of ideal behaviors concerning human interactions in eating, dressing, and education (Crane, 2016). *Chi* (moral understanding, wisdom) refers to the guidance and foundation for people to judge whether the actions and behaviors are proper, and the ability to distinguish between the good and the bad (Zhang, 2002; Zhao, 2018). According to Park and Chesla (2007: 302), the ability that *Chi* refers to 'is not only a cognitive process but also an intuitive process developed through a continuous process of self-cultivation'. *Shin* (trust; fidelity) is interpreted as a moral quality of honesty and integrity to keep the thought, word and behavior consistent with each other without deception or lies. It indicates a state of mind (Zhang, 2002; Crane, 2016; Zhao, 2018). In the social context, people must be trustworthy and reliable in the meaningful human relationships. People should not break the promises or betray family and friends. These five virtues are the most influential and they are the core philosophy of Confucianism that guide the Chinese people's behavior, which ultimately affect teacher-student communication in class as well.

### **2.1.2 Influences of Confucianism on China's Education and the Educational Beliefs of Chinese People**

It is surprising that since 2000, Confucianism has been experiencing a revival (Paradise, 2009; Pang, 2016; Sheng, 2018; 2019). One sign of the revival is the establishment of Confucius Institutes in many countries in Asia, Africa, North America, the Middle East, Europe, and Oceania (Paradise, 2009). Thus, Cai (1982), Chen (2005), Pearce and Lin (2007) Wang (2007), Sun (2008) Murray (2012) Tan (2014), and Song and Jiao (2017) argue that the influences of Confucian values even extend to the current

times. Sheng's work (2018, 2019) extends this by claiming that the influences of Confucianism on the current China's educational reform and development, and people's educational beliefs cannot be ignored since it affects their practices in terms of teacher-student classroom communication. This influence can be seen in three key ways.

Firstly, I accept Chen, Fwu, Wei and Wang's argument that (2016) parents and teachers lay emphasis on students' academic achievements. Zhao (2020) supports this view by pointing out that grades are the most important in deciding whether a student can enter a prestigious university or not, thus making high academic achievement an ever-lasting pursuit of the students and the goal of teaching in China's education. Chinese teachers, parents, and students believe that persistence, effort and hard work contribute to academic success (Stevenson & Stigler, 1992; Stevenson & Lee, 1996; Ji, 2008; Ji, Guo, Zhang & Messervey 2009). Secondly, Zhao (2020) further comments that teacher-centered lecturing mode of teaching still prevails as it is the legacy of Confucian educational culture. I argue that this mode hinders the two-way teacher-student communication in class with the teacher talking and the students listening all the time. This is also not a free-talk-friendly mode. On one hand, classroom communication between teachers and students is limited to content-related communication to serve the pedagogical purposes such as transmitting knowledge and giving instructions. Other forms of non-content related classroom communication which help build relationship or satisfy emotional needs are neglected. On the other hand, a teacher-centered lecture-mode teaching method doesn't leave adequate time for teacher-student communication since teachers focus on teaching the content according to the syllabus. Moreover, since scores are emphasized and valued greatly, and efforts and hard work are believed to achieve high scores, other elements such as non-content related teacher-student communication and interaction might be considered as unimportant for it is not directly linked to the input of knowledge. I contend that this kind of classroom communication overemphasizes the pedagogical purposes while neglecting the importance of teachers' and students' psychological needs. Thirdly, as argued by Zhao (2020), Ji, Guo, Zhang and Messervey (2009), the belief in learning by repetition and doing exercises is still popular among the Chinese. As a result, teacher-student classroom communication is more likely to make way for repetitive exercises or oral drills especially in language classes in China.

In summary, Sheng (2018, 2019) supports my belief that Confucianism is influential on the China's educational system and Chinese people's educational beliefs, which might directly and indirectly affect the way teacher and students communicate in class. As this research was conducted in China, whose culture and people are influenced by Confucianism for thousands of years, the participants' and my viewpoints and values are influenced as well. The communication mode in Chinese classrooms is different and special compared to teacher-student communication in other countries. Both aspects will be taken into account in this research. Moreover, these educational beliefs have an impact on how teachers and students communicate in Chinese classes which will be discussed in the next section.

### **2.1.3 Influences of Confucianism on Chinese Teacher-student Classroom Communication**

Whilst Confucianism is seen to be a key concept in understanding moral education in China (Wang, 2014; Park & Chelsa, 2007; Gorry, 2011; Chuang, 2012; Murray, 2012), the concept of hierarchical authority and humanitarian relationships is of particular importance to my study (Wang, 2014; Park & Chelsa, 2007; Chuang, 2012; Zhao, 2018). The five principal humanitarian relationships are known as '*Wu Lun*' (Kennedy, 2002), including 'ruler and subject (government and citizen), parent and child, husband and wife, older sibling and younger sibling, and friend and friend' (Park & Chelsa, 2007: 303). These five hierarchical relationships indicate that the inferior must be obedient to the superior. The ruler, parent, husband and elder sibling are regarded as the superior. In the friend/friend relationship, the older one is the superior. For instance, in the parent and child relationship, the child must consider the parent as a model, obeying and respecting the parent, and the child is supposed to act as the parent who passes down the virtue of the family (Bi & D'Agostino, 2004; Chuang, 2012). Wang (2014) further states that the Chinese insisted that the 'family ethic' was the basis and foundation of the 'national ethic', and the Chinese believed that if a person was obedient to the parent in the family, he/she would show loyalty to his/her country. Confucius greatly valued 'conformity, submission and deference to status' (Gorry, 2011: 11).

Moral education emphasized by Confucianism has been imbedded in the conceptualization of the Chinese education system and curriculum (Ho, 2018).

According to Guo (2015), contemporary Chinese students are greatly influenced by the ideas of moral education. Chinese students are more accepting of social norms, morality, and moral constraints on their behaviors in school settings than their counterparts in western cultures (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler & Tipton, 1985; Lee, 1996; Tweed & Lehman, 2002). Li's work (2004) extends this, demonstrating Chinese students' beliefs in the connection between learning, moral development and virtue cultivation. This has important implications for my study. The concept of power is important here. How teacher and students communicate in class and why they communicate in that way are both deeply and potentially affected by Confucianism that emphasizes moral virtues. When the context changes from the family to the school, the authority (superior) changes from parents to teachers. However, the relationships remain the same—the inferior must be obedient to the superior. In a society advocating moral education, students are not supposed to disobey their teachers. The hierarchy influences the power balance between teachers and students so that teacher-student communication might not be on equal terms. This merits further investigation.

It has been argued that the hierarchical relationship emphasized by Confucianism decides the power imbalance between teachers and students, resulting in students' acceptance of being obedient and respectful to their teachers (Foong & Daniel, 2013; Sum & Kwon, 2020). Students do not argue with teachers, wait for being called by names to answer questions, and listen quietly in class. Consequently, Chinese students are generally characterized as apparently passive and reticent in the classroom (Flowerdew & Miller, 1995; Turner & Hiraga, 1996; Spizzica, 1997). Cortazzi and Jin's (1996) work is particularly relevant to my study. Their argument that Chinese students are more acceptable to didactic and teacher-centered teaching style with the minimal speaking opportunities offers some explanation for the issue at the center of my research. Confucianism values modesty and collectivism, therefore individualism and self-assertion are generally not encouraged (Bond, 1996; Tang, 2019). In order to be modest, Chinese students tend to respond briefly and participate less in classroom communication (Liu & Littlewood, 1997; Jackson, 2002). This is supported by Confucianism's belief that people should agree to disagree, meaning that when there is disagreement, people can insist their own viewpoints but they should not argue to maintain the harmonious atmosphere and relationship because arguing or criticizing might hurt people and their dignity (Ho & Crookall, 1995; Phuong-Mai, Terlouw &

Pilot, 2005). Therefore, when not supported collectively, Chinese students are more inclined to sacrifice their own opinions in order to be consistent with the group's or teachers' opinions. This is very different from the classroom communication in western countries in which students are encouraged represent themselves, express their own ideas and even argue with their classmates and teachers (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). This is exacerbated by Confucianism's emphasis on learning by repetition and memorizing, classroom communication between Chinese teachers and their students being highly structured and repetitive (Cao, Clarke & Xue, 2010; Lee, Chalmers, Chandra, Yeh & Nason, 2014). Teacher-student classroom communication is limited to repetitive practices so as to help students learn knowledge and complete teaching tasks.

In spite of the above summary of the seemingly negative impacts of Confucianism on teacher-student classroom communication in China, there are different voices offering a strong challenge to these arguments. Kühnen, Egmond, Haber, Kuschel, Özelsel, Rossi and Spivak (2012) comment that Confucianism also values teacher-student communication in class. In so doing, they challenge the work by Bond (1996), Tang (2019), Cao, Clarke and Xue (2010), Lee, Chalmers, Chandra, Yeh and Nason (2014). Their argument is persuasive that the form of classroom communication emphasized by Confucianism being different does not mean the dialogue between teachers and students is absent from the legacy of Confucianism. They contend that Confucianism encourages teachers to ask students rhetorical and difficult questions and require them to think critically. Tweed and Lehman (2002) extend this by noting that the principles of Confucian learning require students to acquire knowledge by taking a critical attitude towards the learning materials and engage in communication with peers and teachers. Cheng's (2000) argument is more interesting and directly challenges the work of Foong and Daniel (2013), and Sum and Kwon (2020). He contends that the impact of Confucianism on teacher-student classroom communication is distorted to some extents. For instance, questioning and challenging teachers is encouraged by Confucius, which is rarely cited in the current research. It is a tradition that students raise hands or they are called by names to answer questions in China. Students can talk when acquiring teachers' permission. This shows respect to teachers and knowledge and it is a symbol of discipline. However, it does not mean that teachers cannot be challenged or questioned by students. Cheng (2000) critiques that the distortion derives

from the misunderstandings of the contents of *Analects*, the stereotype and over-generalization of the way Chinese teachers and students communicate in class, and the taken-for-granted attitudes towards the phenomenon. These different voices provide a new angle for me so that the influences of Confucianism on teacher-student classroom communication in Chinese classes can be neutrally and critically evaluated.

In conclusion, I argue that no matter whether the impacts are positive or negative, Confucian values which are embedded in the ways of communicating continue to influence Chinese teachers and students and the classroom communication whether they are conscious or not (Turner, 2011). The different views on Confucianism provide an interesting area for exploration in my research. Although this study concerns communication in English language classes which might involve different cultures and educational beliefs, the social and cultural contexts remain the same. The languages spoken in class does not change the context and the deep-rooted impact of Confucianism on teacher-student classroom communication. Confucianism and its values are dominant factors shaping and influencing the Chinese teachers' and students' perceptions and their way of communication in class, which is also manifested in EFL classes (Wen & Clément, 2003).

Confucianism has got a huge influence on how we understand the process of education in China. It provides a context within which education contains particular meanings. Therefore, following the critical evaluation of Confucian values and the influences of Confucianism on teacher-student classroom communication in Chinese classes, I move on to the conceptualization of education.

## **2.2 Conceptualizing Education**

Since this is an empirical educational research and eventually implications for better practice will be put forward, it is essential and significant to return to the original core concept of education in order to inform the shape of my study and the conclusions I draw from it. This is also necessary as my study focuses on how ideas of education are enacted.

The most fundamental question 'what is education' is always raised and discussed among educators, researchers, and teachers. A series of interrelated questions and topics will be prompted by this one, such as the aims of education, what to teach, and how to educate efficiently and effectively. Jackson's (2011, 2012) argument that



education is a social process of the transmission of culture is quite straightforward. According to him, the goal of education is to stimulate the students to make enduring changes in order to become better and develop better characters and qualities in the social environment and eventually it will extend to the entire world. I accept his argument as a broad and generalized definition of education, emphasizing the cultivation of students' qualities to ultimately integrate well into society and the world. However, as Furedi (2009) argues, when education is discussed, pedagogies, teaching methods, teaching techniques, and teaching strategies are more likely the focus and concerns instead of the basic and core question of what education is. Furedi's (2009: 46) work extends this viewpoint by pointing out that these elements are important, and function as 'aids', but cannot be confused with the meaning of education. Furedi (2009) defines education as the opportunity to maintain and renew intellectual inheritance. This interpretation suggests that education is a process of passing down knowledge from generation to generation. Different from the former statement, it lays emphasis on the transmission of knowledge. Challenging these ideas, Oakeshott (1989) and Arendt (2006) argue that education is a natural transaction that one generation educates the next generation. This statement stands from a parent-children perspective, interpreting education in a broader sense instead of simply limiting education to the systematic school education.

An alternative conceptualization of education comes from examining its aims, objectives, goals and functions because these aspects are inter-related and inseparable. There is much debate over the aims of education. Looking back on the above discussion, Jackson (2011) emphasizes cultivating people's qualities for the service of society and the world in the future while Furedi (2009) emphasizes that one important aim of education is transmitting knowledge. Supporting both of these arguments, Downie, Loudfoot and Telfer (1974), and White (2009) claim that the aims of education possibly contain intrinsic and extrinsic aspects. Intrinsic aims describe the desirable development of knowledge in itself while extrinsic aim means the necessary knowledge for the pursuit of moral qualities, personal happiness or the welfare of society. Conversely, Watson's work supports (2016: 152) Furedi's conceptualization of the aims of education by claiming that the traditional version of the aims of education which lays emphasis on the 'transmission and acquisition of truth and knowledge' is more persuasive. Scheffler (1965), Goldman (2016), Adler (2003) and Robertson (2009)

are all advocates of this viewpoint and they claim that the basic tasks of education are to develop and transmit knowledge. Extending this, Hirst and Peters (1970: 19) offer an alternative interpretation of this view by explaining that ‘desirable qualities people’ are those who are able to develop knowledge and knowledge and understanding. Sockett (2012) also supports this view and comments that education without knowledge transmission is unbelievable and unreasonable. These statements all connect education with the pursuit of knowledge. Alternatively, Watson (2016: 152-154) summarizes three perspectives of the aims of education—‘goods-based accounts’, ‘skills-based accounts’, and ‘character-based accounts’. According to Watson (2016: 153), in addition to knowledge transmission, another version of the goods-based accounts indicates that the aims of education ‘advocates understanding’. This perspective emphasizes that the aims of education not only lie in transmitting knowledge and truth but understanding the transmitted knowledge and truths as well. In comparison with goods-based accounts, skills-based accounts require a combination of theory and practice, stressing the point that the cultivation of skills should be included in the aims of education (Watson, 2016). This viewpoint is supported by philosophers such as Ennis (1962), Freire (1970), McPeck (1984), Siegel (1988), Paul (1990), and Lipman (1991). However, character-based accounts claim that the aims of education should involve ‘the nurture and cultivation of particular character traits or virtues in the learner’ (Watson, 2016: 154). This is emphasized by Confucianism which focuses on moral education. Similar to the illustration of skill-based education, this is also a learner-centered perspective. Kilpatrick (1951) asserts that the nurture, cultivation and development of good and all-round character and behavior is the primary aim of education. Gutmann (1987) strengthens the view by emphasizing that all educable children must be educated so that different abilities could be cultivated. Advocates of character-based education put emphasis on the cultivation of students’ virtues and great qualities for the sake of the future of society and country. In addition to the above three perspectives, Peters (1967: 2) argues that education cannot be separated from ‘judgements of value’. Curren’s (2014) illustration that wisdom and judgement were considered as the highest aim of education in ancient Greece supports this conceptualization of education. Challenging the above understandings of the aims of education, Schmitt (2005: 225) argues that the principal aim of education is a ‘true, justified and rational belief’. An alternative perspective on knowledge, judgement, and

characters are greatly concerned when referring to the aims of education, Nodding's book *Happiness and Education* (Nodding, 2003) has aroused my interest because connecting happiness with education is not a common perspective. In his book, happiness is claimed to be closely related to education so that it should be the aim of education (Nodding, 2003). He further illustrates that a good education should significantly make contribution to either personal happiness or the happiness of the entire human beings (Nodding, 2003). I hold the belief that happiness is the basic psychological need of human being so that it is one of the aims of education. On one hand, in order to live happily, students learn knowledge, skills and cultivate qualities. On the other hand, students should be helped to engage happily with the act of learning. Building on Nodding, Kristjánsson (2016) states that prominent educational philosophers such as Brighouse (2006), de Ruyter (2004), and White (2011) propose that the overarching aim and ultimate pursuit of education is human flourishing, which extends Jackson's (2011) work. Gareth (2009: 175) supports this argument of offering a summary that students are educated to become 'competent, informed, thoughtful, and responsible', and in order to develop into such kinds of people, it is essential to think about what is needed to be a flourishing person and create a flourishing society.

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that education is a complex concept. Although the arguments concerning education all refer to its aims, the beliefs, understandings and interpretations of the aims of education vary from educators and philosophers. The key words include knowledge, skills, characters, judgement, belief, flourishing, and happiness which are all significant and important although the focus and emphasis are different. These interpretations of education are all sensible but partial. If these key concepts are combined and integrated, then a holistic concept emerges: Education provides a platform, a happy journey and an opportunity for students to receive, understand, and create knowledge passed down from generation to generation. During the process, students' abilities to know, understand, imagine, observe, think critically, and reflect on issues, make judgement, and question are developed simultaneously (Furedi, 2009). Students are eventually cultivated into flourishing human beings with high qualities and virtues who ultimately will be able to make contribution to society and the world.

This critique of the literature has allowed me to develop my own view of the aims of education which inform my research. From a teacher's perspective, I argue that there

are three layers of education: 1) students are educated to gain knowledge and skills, develop interests, and cultivate qualities and characters; 2) students either learn by themselves or they are guided by teachers about how to learn and how to form their own views; 3) in the process of becoming educated, students confront profound questions such as what kind of people they want to be and what they want to do in life. The first layer is the basis of education, helping student become equipped with fundamental knowledge and skills. The second layer requires students to learn independently and think critically so that they can become independent individuals with their own judgement, ideas, and methods to learn, thus adding to the knowledge pool. The third layer is the highest level. Students must be clear about their life goals—to live happily, to achieve personal success, or to make contribution to society and the world. This is a spiritual level, which cannot be taught, but guided by what they have learned. It is a self-actualization level based on the first two layers as Maslow’s hierarchy of needs illustrates. During the process of being educated, students gradually form their views of the world and life, and eventually they make decisions for their own life. I argue that teacher-student classroom communication plays a key role in supporting the achievement of these education aims.

The empirical part of my research will be used to explore the degree to which my interpretation is valid. In the next section, a critical discussion on the concept of communication will be discussed prior to narrowing down to the exploration of teacher-student classroom communication.

### **2.3 A Critical Discussion on the Concept of Communication**

No matter whether it is to achieve success, to give instructions, to maintain interpersonal relationship or simply to socialize, communication is inevitable. As stated in Chapter 1, Wazlawick, Bavelas and Jackson’s (1967: 49) ‘one cannot not communicate’ has always been occupying the top position in the whole process of my research. These four common words illustrate and summarize the essence, importance, and inevitability of communication in human society. Dissanayake (2018: 461) calls communication the ‘lifeblood of society’. Othman and Rusian’s (2020) work best illustrates the importance of communication by claiming that social life continues via various forms of communication. We communicate with one or more people in families, schools, companies, and communities. Even when we stay in our own room, we might

communicate with others via the Internet. This is supported by Rai and Rai (2009) who describe communication as the core to everything done by people because they consider effective communication as the ability to succeed or achieve goals in life. Extending this viewpoint, Teng, Zhang, and Lou (2020) point out that communication, especially effective communication is helpful to avoid and prevent uncertainty, build mutual trust, and improve and strengthen relationships. People communicate for different reasons and purposes. Social activities are conducted with the help of communication, consciously or unconsciously, verbally or nonverbally, online or offline. We live in the world, so we cannot totally avoid communication with other people. I regard teaching as a social activity as well, therefore, communication is also an indispensable and important element (Roszkowska & Trepka-Starosta, 2020).

In Chapter 1, different definitions of communication have been presented. According to Turk (1985), the model illustrating communication process designed by Shannon and Weaver (1949) is one of the oldest and it is the most widely used when studying communication. I accept the model as a straightforward illustration of communication process.

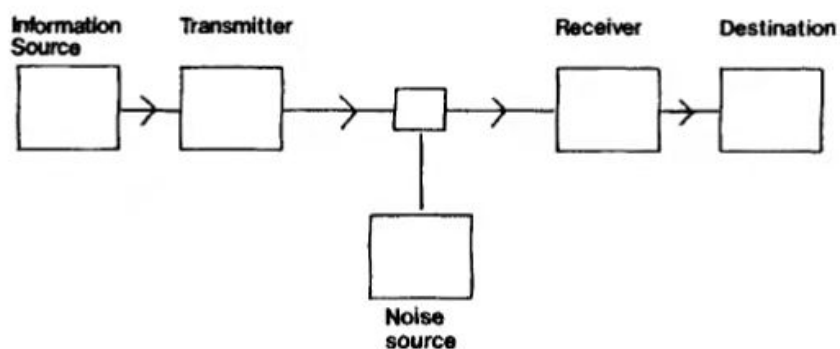


Figure 2.1 *The Shannon and Weaver model (Shannon & Weaver, 1949: 34)*

However, this model is based on mathematical theory (Dissanayake, 2018) and schematizes a one-way message transmission process which emphasizes the flow of information. Devito's (1997) definition quoted in Chapter 1 is based on this model, but modifies the process as a two-way interaction since feedback has been added to the definition. Dissanayake (2018) supports this argument by commenting that although

being a linear model, presenting communication as a one-way communication process is one deficiency. I argue that this one-way model demonstrates a lecture-mode knowledge transmission process. Teachers transform information sources into messages. The messages are delivered by channels. In an EFL class, channels might be English language, Chinese language, or body language. Students receive the messages. As is the same disadvantage of being linear, this kind of teacher-student classroom communication lacks interaction. Students listen passively. The noise source such as students' English proficiency level might distort the messages, leading to misunderstandings both to knowledge and the meanings of teachers' words. Under the circumstance, what the teachers say must be very careful to reduce misunderstandings. Turk (1985) extends this by pointing out that this model tells communicators to select and shape the information so that it meets the needs of the listeners.

Alternatively, as is illustrated by Rai and Rai (2019), a two-way communication process requires feedback from the message receivers.

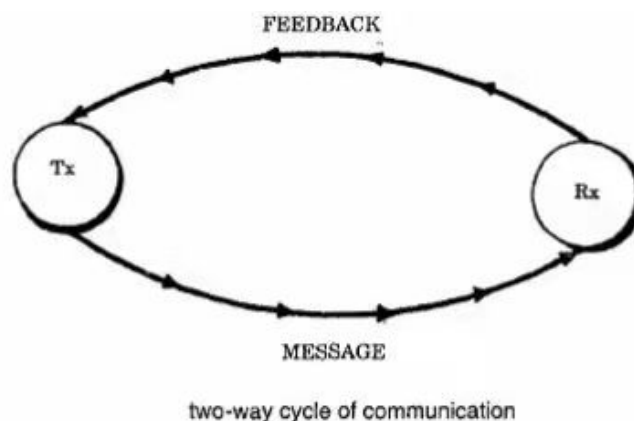


Figure 2.2 *Two-way Cycle of Communication* (Rai, U. & Rai, S.M., 2009: 4)

A two-way communication process involves noises as well. However, if a teacher gets the feedback from the students regardless of its being positive or negative, at least he/she will possibly know whether he/she has been misunderstood. Therefore, supported by Fashiku (2017), a two-way communication process is quite important in education because teaching not only involves teachers' one-way talking, but also the interaction with students in order to exchange ideas, ensure understandings, and build relationships. Hence, I argue that the two-way cycle of communication proposed by Rai and Rai (2009) is the most relevant to this research because teacher-student classroom

communication should be a two-way mode rather than a one-way mode with teachers talking all the time.

In the next section, I narrow down to the key concept of teacher-student classroom communication and evaluate critically its importance to teaching and learning.

## **2.4 Conceptualizing Teacher-student Classroom Communication and a Critical Evaluation on its Importance**

In this section, the importance and roles of teacher-student classroom communication, the current situation of teacher-student classroom communication in the university and in EFL classes will be discussed.

The above section has stated that social activities are conducted via various forms of communication. Education, as one of the social activities, cannot be separated from the context of communication (Ubong & Okpor, 2018). Bulut Ozsezer and Iflazoglu Saban's (2016) work supports this idea and illustrates education as an activity of communication. Ubong and Okpor (2018) further emphasize that these two concepts (communication and education) are interconnected and interwoven. According to Ubong and Lkpor (2018), teaching as the core issue of education, is a social activity as well which cannot happen without communication. I argue that teaching is conducted via various kinds of communication as well no matter whether it is the process of transmission of knowledge, cultivation of skills or satisfying emotional needs. In this sense, there are similarities between teaching and social activities. Supported by Kuzu (2003), teacher-student classroom communication, functioning as a media, a tool or an approach of information, idea and message exchanging and sharing, is incorporated into the process of teaching. Vygotsky (1962, 1978) adds to this view that learning is also a social activity, which involves social interaction as well. Students learn not only via listening to lectures, but also via communicating with teachers and peers. Hence, Wazlawick, Bavelas and Jackson's (1967: 49) 'one cannot not communicate' applies to both teaching and learning.

Prior to the discussion of the importance of teacher-student classroom communication, it is important to define and understand the concept of teacher-student classroom communication in the context of this study. As emphasized, this study was conducted in the context of EFL classes in China. In addition to being directly

influenced by Chinese culture and Confucianism, the nature of second language classes decides that classroom communication is both ‘the vehicle and object’ (Long, 1983: 9). Classroom communication is unique and complex in second language classes because it is not only the instrument facilitating teaching and learning, but also the target teaching and learning object (Walsh, 2006). Cazden (1986: 432) supports the viewpoint by pointing out that classroom communication in the EFL classes context is ‘multinational, multilingual and multicultural’. Under the circumstances, I propose that teacher-student classroom communication in this study can be understood as both a teaching and learning object and a tool to facilitate teaching and learning. To be more specific, the teacher-student classroom communication in this study I refer to means the speech communication (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013) meaning the verbal languages spoken by teachers and students either to serve pedagogical purposes or psychological purposes, which might be a one-way or a two-way pattern. However, the term classroom interaction is frequently used which also indicates classroom communication and the similarities between these two concepts makes it confusing and easily misunderstood. I accept Liddicoat and Scarino’s (2013) argument that classroom interaction has a relatively variable and wide interpretation and definition. By contrast, the scope of classroom communication is limited. I have defined it in Chapter 1—I am using teacher-student classroom communication to indicate the face-to-face speech communication between teachers and students to ensure teaching and learning in the classroom context (Yusof & Halim, 2014). It includes content related and non-content related communication. In this chapter, I further explain what teacher-student classroom communication means to this study in the above section to eliminate misunderstandings and to clarify the focus of this research.

Drawing upon the learning from the literature and my understandings, I then conceptualize teacher-student classroom as an element ‘complex and central to all classroom activity’ which performs different functions and should be valued and examined when efforts to improve teaching and learning are made (Walsh, 2015: 8). It underpins everything that happens in a classroom setting. This is further supported by van Lier’s (1988: 87) work in which he considers teacher-student classroom communication as ‘the most important thing on the curriculum’. As discussed in the above section, whilst the education aims range widely, the importance and functions of



teacher-student classroom communication should not be limited to knowledge transmission but can be seen in the following aspects as well.

Firstly, effective teacher-student classroom communication is related to positive classroom atmosphere. As argued by Shan, Li, Shi, Wang and Cai (2014), and Poulou (2014), a good teaching and learning atmosphere contributes to students' learning attitudes and performances. When a positive classroom environment and atmosphere is created through effective teacher-student communication, students' discipline problems can be prevented, and students' academic outcomes might be improved because they might be more engaged and interested in class when they are emotionally satisfied. According to Shan, Li, Shi, Wang and Cai (2014), effective teacher-student classroom communication requires teachers to respond to students' need immediately, encourage students more, and build positive teacher-student relationships so that they create a positive classroom atmosphere. Conroy, Sutherland, Snyder, Al-Hendawi and Vo (2009), Agustina and Setiawan (2020), and Rachmawati (2020A) extend this idea by commenting that positive classroom atmosphere is regarded as an effective, useful and powerful tool that is used by teachers to encourage students to learn. A positive classroom atmosphere is relaxing, active and engaging, which allows both teachers and students to enjoy teaching and learning when they feel less pressured. More importantly, positive and effective communication helps to build mutual trust, confidence and understanding between teachers and students, thus leading to a positive classroom atmosphere. Therefore, teacher-student classroom communication is one decisive factor in creating a positive classroom atmosphere. This indicates that these two elements are highly correlated and they should be fully investigated through my study.

Secondly, positive teacher-student classroom communication contributes to positive teacher-student relationships, which is an important element of good learning outcomes (Frymier & Houser, 2000). Devito (1986) regards teaching as a process of building and maintaining relationships between teachers and students. This is confirmed by Graham, West, and Schaller (1992) who believe that teaching is a process of developing teacher-student, and student-student relationship, which requires teachers to be equipped with good interpersonal communication skills to acquire satisfying teaching and learning outcomes. Similar to any other interpersonal relationship, students are more willing to listen to the teachers they like. If students like the teaching content and the teacher, this kind of positive attitude has a direct and

indirect impact on their cognitive learning (Bloom, Hastings & Madaus, 1971; Rodriquez, Plax & Kearney, 1996; Ellis, 1999).

Thirdly, Andersen (1979), Christophel (1990), Richmond, Gorham and McCroskey (1987), and Mazer (2013) all give a strong support to the argument that teachers' immediacy behaviors such as asking for students' opinions, confirming students' answers, offering encouragement and simple greetings, which are implemented through both verbal and nonverbal communication can greatly motivate students and emotionally stimulate students' interest in learning. Students' emotional arousal is beneficial to their engagement, resulting in encoding more information more easily.

Fourthly, the statement made by Harp and Mayer (1997), and Glaser-Zikuda and Fuss (2008) is persuasive that if teachers are able to give in-time feedback, clarify the materials clearly, and give clear instructions, students will be more cognitively interested because they can better understand the teaching content. Responsive and timely teacher-student communication in class such as confirmation of students' good performance and behaviors facilitate a better learning experience. Mazer (2013) extends the viewpoint that teachers' immediate communication with the students can motivate students, stimulate their emotional interest, and help them engage more so that they can concentrate on the course and they are more willing to learn more. This is confirmed by Anstey and Bull (1996), Blaise and Nuttal (2010), Blank (2002), Culican (2005), Lodge (2008), Rose (2005), and Walsh (2006), who claim that what teachers say can either assist or hinder students' engagement and learning attitudes.

Lastly, according to Roszkowska and Trepka-Starosta (2020), effective teacher-student classroom communication potentially contributes to students' individual development, the implementation of the teaching goals and educational purposes, and the development of competence in a class setting. If teachers communicate with the students based on mutual respect and understanding, students are more willing to share problems, listen more attentively, perform more actively and have higher self-esteem. This kind of teacher-student interaction helps students to reduce anxiety and cultivate the ability of autonomy and self-discipline as well. Proper teacher-student communication in class is not only required for the teaching process, but also enables teachers to avoid conflicts and solve problems in class, and satisfy students' emotional

and psychological needs (the need for security, emotional communication with others, respect, recognition and self-fulfillment) (Roszkowska & Trepka-Starosta, 2020).

From the above review and critique of literature, I have developed a deeper understanding of the importance of teacher-student classroom communication. The literature also led me to ask the research questions presented in Chapter 1. I therefore contend that effective teacher-student classroom communication plays an important role in every aspect of teaching and learning, and it especially requires the teachers to hold different communication skills. Effective content-related communication helps teachers to transmit knowledge more clearly and makes teaching content more understandable to students, while effective non-content-related communication emotionally and psychologically support students, and manage the classrooms. Both of these two kinds of classroom communication between teachers and students are beneficial to better serve educational goals, and contribute to improving students' learning attitudes, performance and outcomes.

On the contrary, ineffective teacher-student classroom communication might be a barrier to teaching and learning. Supported by Roszkowska & Trepka-Starosta (2020), if the communication between teachers and students is not smooth, misunderstandings and negative feelings might arise. When teachers fail to explain things clearly, learning will be rendered more difficult since students will have difficulty understanding materials, content and meanings. When teachers are not able to give clear instruction or clarify tasks, students will be confused and anxious about what to do and how to do the tasks. When teachers do not respond or give confirmation immediately, students might be disappointed, and they cannot be motivated, thus leading to their less engagement in class. When teachers' words are too harsh or even hurtful, students' negative feelings might arise and they will feel fearful, stressful, and unpleasant. In summary, teacher-student communication problems are harmful to the achievement of teaching goals and students' learning attitudes and performance.

In short, teachers' effective communication with students in class helps to create a relaxing classroom environment and atmosphere and develop a good teacher-student relationship, thus building mutual trust and support, which is emotionally and psychologically beneficial to better teaching and learning. Moreover, teachers' communication skills can help them clearly express ideas, explain teaching content, give instructions, assign tasks, and solve problems. In addition, in-time feedback such

as confirmation of ideas and answers, compliments, and encouragements can stimulate and motivate students to learn more and better. I follow Fashiku (2017: 174) in seeing that teacher-student classroom effective communication is one useful tool and basis in education. It strengthens the truly meaningful teacher-student interaction in class.

Since there are many benefits of effective teacher-student communication, it is essential to evaluate and conceptualize ‘effective’ teacher-student classroom communication.

## **2.5 Conceptualizing Teacher-student Effective Classroom Communication**

Accepting Walsh’s (2015) argument that if teachers want to become effective, they should not only understand what effective classroom communication is, but also improve it as well, I intend to critically discuss what kind of communication between teachers and students is effective and what kind of communication skills or competences teachers must have to make the communication effective. I start by examining different explanations of the features of effective classroom communication between teachers and students.

Fashiku (2017) claims that effective teacher-student classroom communication means teacher are able to guide students to understand the content taught by teachers and interpret the ideas or meanings of different concepts. It requires both the encoder (teachers) and the decoders (students) to thoroughly understand the communication and interaction. I accept this argument but contend that this perspective focuses on the pedagogical aspects. Therefore, although Fashiku’s (2017) work is particular important to this study and his explanation for effective teacher-student classroom communication is rational, it is partial as well.

Alternatively, Salami’s (2009) summary of five features of teachers’ effective communication with students covers more aspects. According to Salami (2009), firstly, teachers should able to academically communicate well, which means they can effectively and confidently teach students and complete teaching tasks. Secondly, teachers should be ready to inspire and motivate students. Thirdly, teachers should be capable to satisfy students’ emotional, psychological, and social needs through communication. Fourthly, students should be encouraged and motivated to develop critical thinking ability. Lastly, teachers should be able to help and guide students to

develop interpersonal relationships. If teachers' communication with students satisfies the above requirements, then the communication is effective. However, this is a teacher-centered view for it assumes that communication comes only one-way. Thus, I argue that this statement overemphasizes teachers' responsibility for communicating effectively with students while ignoring that classroom communication between teachers and students is a two-way process.

Based on Salami (2009), Polk's (2006: 25) work emphasizes that 'clarity', indicating teachers' capability of talking expressively, structuring and organizing information into a logical and understandable way, elaborating clearly, scaffolding knowledge at a proper and linear pace, and utilizing metaphor to relate to and explain difficult ideas, points and concepts, is always tightly connected with effective communication. Teachers' clarity skill helps the knowledge delivery process, including transmitting knowledge, explaining difficult theories, concepts, and cases, giving instructions, assigning tasks, and asking and answering questions. Under the circumstances, things are more understandable and acceptable to students so that the learning outcomes can be optimized. Polk's (2006) criteria of effective teacher-student classroom communication is based on teachers' clarity skills. I critique that this is also a teacher-centered perspective and this kind of effective teacher-student classroom communication only refers to content-related teaching and learning.

Challenging Polk (2006), Malandrakis, Karagianni and Pani (2016) argue that questions, as one kind of the teacher-student classroom verbal communication, can stimulate students to think and students' answers are a kind of feedback to tell the teachers about students' understanding of the teaching content. In addition to giving instructions, transmitting knowledge, completing teaching tasks, and non-content related talks such as greetings, teachers should frequently ask questions in class. This is an important classroom communication as well no matter whether it is a teaching content related question-and-answer or an idea exchanging process. The question-and-answer mode helps teachers to check students' understanding while the idea exchanging mode prompts critical thinking, guides to solve problems, and encourages students to express their own ideas and opinions. Therefore, according to Malandrakis, Karagianni and Pani (2016), frequent 'question and answer' should be the important feature to evaluate the effectiveness of student learning. I argue that although this

viewpoint stands upon a two-way classroom communication stance, it neglects other features of ‘being effective’ concerning the practice of classroom communication.

By reviewing the literature and different perspectives towards effective teacher-student classroom communication, I contend that effective teacher-student classroom communication involves a wide range of features and strategies as indicated above. As I argued, defining effective teacher-student classroom communication should not be limited to one aspect. Instead, it should be viewed from different angles and all the different elements mentioned above should be taken into consideration. I use Walsh’s (2002; 2011) argument to conceptualize effective teacher-student classroom communication: when language(s) can be used to help and promote rather than hinder teaching and learning process, it can be described as being effective. I accept this argument as the essence of effectiveness of teacher-student classroom communication and a summary of all the above argument.

However, the communication between teachers and students is not always effective and smooth. In the next section, I move on to discuss the problems of teacher-student classroom communication in the Chinese context.

## **2.6 A Critical Discussion on the Common Problems of Teacher-student Classroom Communication in the Chinese Context**

Teacher-student classroom communication is not always effective or successful. As discussed in Chapter 1, in the message and information transmission process, ‘noise’ occurs from time to time. The forms of ‘noise’ are various, but all of them hinder transmitting and receiving messages. The same thing occurs in teacher-student classroom communication as well. According to Fashiku (2017: 182), these noises include: 1) both teachers’ and students’ communication skills; 2) the problems of the original meanings of messages and information; 3) non-conforming verbal and non-verbal messages; 4) distorting interpretations of messages and information; 5) difficulty in receiving too much information; 6) improper timing; 7) ‘perception problem’; 8) ‘psychological problems’; 9) unexpected environment noises inside and outside the classroom. Moreover, cultural differences, and past experiences also might be the ‘noise’ of communication process. In addition to these common problems of teacher-student classroom communication, there are also specific problems hindering effective communication happening in the Chinese context.

As discussed, the theories and teachings of Confucianism are rooted in every aspect of Chinese people's daily life. As a result, Chinese students' beliefs, school performances, and behaviors are greatly guided by Confucianism (Nelson, 1995; Oxford, 1995; Biggs, 1996; Flowerdew, 1998; Kennedy, 2002; Zhan, 2019). Zhan (2019:974) argues that Confucianism lays emphasis on hierarchical relations, thus dividing the relationship between teachers and students into 'superiority' and 'subordination'. Guo and Pungur (2008), and Ai (2017) supports this view by commenting that in the Chinese educational context, the status of teachers is traditionally considered quite high in society because the value of education and the pursuit of knowledge are deemed superior to any other professions by Chinese since Confucius era. As discussed in the previous section, this can also be a positive. Teachers are respected by both students and their parents. Since teachers have a higher status than students and teachers are believed to have acquired more knowledge, students are taught to be humble and obedient when communicating with their teachers (Li & Wegerif, 2014; Ai, 2017). Growing up in such a context, both students and teachers are accustomed to this form of classroom communication. Peng and Liu (2007), and Tan (2008) further illustrate when teachers were young, as students themselves, they were taught to respect teachers such as greeting and bowing to teachers, and listening without interrupting when teachers were talking. After they become teachers, they are regarded as the authority and receive respect without doubt. They might communicate with the students in a similar way as their teachers used to do. This educational tradition has been passed down from generation to generation in China. In Chinese classrooms, students stand up to answer questions or express ideas. When they have questions or they want to share opinions, they raise hands first, waiting for teachers' permission to speak (Xie, 2009). When students don't agree with teacher, they either keep silent or communicate with the teacher with respect. They speak carefully and humbly instead of challenging the teacher directly when they disagree with the teacher. By contrast, teachers usually don't have so many rules or restrictions when communicating with their students because they are regarded as authority. This well illustrates the typical Chinese teacher-student classroom communication. As I argued in the previous section, this kind of teacher-student communication is not based on equal terms, which might hinder the effectiveness. It is not beneficial to build a relaxing environment and a good teacher-student relationship. I accept Menzel and Carrell's (1999) argument that

students might not be willing to communicate in class when they feel nervous and anxious, and they are afraid to be offensive. This is not helpful to either teaching or learning.

Moreover, teacher-centered lecture mode has been employed since ancient China and is still commonly applied currently (Yang, 2011). As discussed in the previous section, this mode of teaching allows little argumentation or discussion in class. Students are required to listen to teachers attentively and take down notes (Xie, 2009). ‘Learning through listening’ (Cortazzi, Jin & Coleman, 1996: 748) is a kind of cognitive style believed by Chinese, which does not advocate questioning, challenging, argument and discussion. Although it is argued that questioning and challenging teachers is not considered as being offensive in the Chinese context, the lecture mode teaching style does not facilitate free communication and different voices to be heard in class. It is true that lecture-mode classes have advantages. For instance, lecture-mode teaching style is an efficient approach to the completion of teaching tasks. However, this mode is not friendly to teacher-student communication in class since in this kind of classes, teachers talk most of the time, leaving inadequate time for communication. Anderson (2003) supports the argument by directly pointing out that the interactive communication between teachers and students is valued as the highest form of classroom communication and interaction from students’ perspectives.

Furthermore, as discussed, the Chinese believe that academic achievements can be achieved through efforts, diligence and hard work (Stevenson & Stigler 1992; Stevenson & Lee 1996; Ji, 2008; Ji, Guo, Zhang & Messervey 2009; Zhan, 2019). The key elements to success does not include effective classroom communication between teachers and students, leading to the neglect of the positive impacts and importance of it. In two different large-scale teaching skill competitions I took part in, the criteria of judging the winners emphasized a lot on teachers’ pedagogical skills. Teachers’ communication skills and effective classroom communication were mentioned as well, but the percentage was low compared with other scoring items. When the teacher competitors were displaying the teaching process, there were no students allowed to be present. Teachers were asked to display the slides, how they would teach, what questions they intended to ask, and the teaching methods. Teacher-student communication was not a requirement. In a word, being regarded as not a vital element to achieve academic success, teacher-student classroom communication is always



neglected (Carr & Landon, 1998). Another problem resulted from the over-emphasis on the pursuit in academic achievement is that the teaching tasks are heavy. In order to transmit more knowledge and complete teaching tasks, teacher-student classroom communication is more inclined to be sacrificed for pedagogical activities such as knowledge transmission.

Lastly, as discussed in Chapter 1, the expansion of China's High Education results in the rapid increase of the number of university students. Consequently, the university teacher-student ratio is rather low, and the ratio is even lower for EFL classes since English has become a global language and a required skill throughout the whole world, leading to more and more English language learners. According to Zhang (2006), Hu and McGrath (2011), the EFL teacher-student ratio was 1: 200 in China in 2006. The low teacher-student ratio is not helpful to promote classroom communication between teachers and students. A large class size with too many students indicates that not each student would have an opportunity to talk within the class time duration.

In summary, the hierarchical status and respect to teachers emphasized by Confucianism leads to teacher-student communication on an unequal term. Besides, the prevailing lecture-mode teaching style also hinders classroom communication. Furthermore, the belief in hard work and focus on academic achievement result in neglect of classroom communication among both teachers and students. The size of university classes is also another disadvantage to classroom communication. These are common problems preventing teacher-student classroom communication in the Chinese context. In the next section, I narrow down the discussion to specific problems in Chinese EFL classes since it is the most relevant to this study.

## **2.7 A Critical Discussion on the Problems of Teacher-student Classroom Communication in EFL classes in the Chinese Context**

As any other subject in China, communication between teachers and students in EFL classes has the common problems mentioned in the above section. However, English language courses are differentiated from other courses since EFL classes are taught via a foreign language instead of the first language. Additionally, in EFL classes, English is not only a medium of teaching and a communication tool, but also students' learning object (Senowarsito, 2013). Long (1983: 134) argues in more detail that in a language class, the language being used is not only a method of teaching and learning

new knowledge, it is the ‘goal’, ‘the vehicle and object of study’. In EFL classes, English language is used to transmit and acquire knowledge, develop skills, ask and answer questions, solve problems, build and maintain teacher-student relationships, and build mutual understandings, a position Walsh (2015:8) describes as the ‘heart of everything’. The special features of EFL classes arouse specific problems in classroom communication.

Firstly, students’ English language proficiency might be an important factor preventing students from communicating with their teachers in EFL classes (Jin & Cortazzi, 2011; Jiménez, 2015; Listyaningrum Arifin, 2017; Xing & Bolden, 2019). Although a large quantity of Chinese students start to learn English when they were very young, their English language proficiency might still be problematic. When students’ English level is not high or students themselves don’t regard their English level as good enough, they try to avoid oral communication. Khajavy, Ghonsooly, Hosseini and Choi (2016) support Jin and Cortazzi’s (2011: 11) contention that students tend to respond to teachers by using short expressions or phrases, or give minimal feedback when they have to answer questions or communicate with teachers and classmates because they lack confidence, fear of making mistakes and they have perceived low proficiency in English. There are also students whose English level is not as low as what they believe, but they are not confident of their English level and have a low self-esteem of speaking in English. No matter what kind of situation it is, both inhibit teacher-student communication in EFL classes.

Secondly, communicating in a foreign language is difficult, which might cause ‘speech anxiety’ not only to students but to non-native English language speaker teachers as well (Listyaningrum Arifin, 2017: 31). For non-natives, it is not easy to search for correct and appropriate words and arrange them in grammatical order so that a sentence is well organized because the rules and habits of their first language are totally different. The psychological anxiety of speaking in a foreign language is a barrier of classroom communication (Jackson, 2002; Xie, 2009; 2010). Extending this argument, Jiménez (2015) further explains that it is even harder for non-natives to speak fluently because of the interference of the first language. Therefore, in EFL classes, both teachers and students might feel nervous and apprehensive when communicating in English instead of their first language.

Thirdly, as discussed above, the communication medium in EFL classes is not the first language to students and the non-native speaker teachers as well. When the teachers are native speakers and the students are non-native speakers, being able to speak fluently and understand English as a language is not enough for effective classroom communication since these two groups do not share the same culture (Koch & Takashima, 2021). Supporting Koch and Takashima (2021), Littlewood (2011), and Taşdemir and Gürbüz (2021) argue that the limited intercultural understanding might cause misunderstandings and also become a barrier of classroom communication between teachers and students. Although native English speaker language teachers generally do not have English proficiency problems and language anxiety, they don't have a solid understanding of Chinese culture (Rao & Yuan, 2016). Both native English speaker language teachers and their non-native English speaker students might find it difficult to adapt to the different communication styles. In the university I work within, native English speaker language teachers complain that Chinese (non-native English speaker) students are quiet and not willing to communicate with them no matter whether it is just a greeting, a compliment, question-answer or idea sharing. However, the students complain that their native English speaker language teachers wait for them to speak instead of calling their names to answer questions or express ideas. Furthermore, growing up and receiving education in totally different social, cultural and educational contexts also leads to lack of common topics. For instance, native English speaker language teachers know little about what topics their non-native English speaker students like. Due to cultural differences, misunderstandings and problems in communication occur from time to time in EFL classes.

In conclusion, in addition to the common teacher-student classroom communication problems, there are particular language and culture related problems hindering effective classroom communication in a EFL class setting in the Chinese context. Both teachers and students might be the cause of problems such as their language proficiency and cultural differences.

Following the critical discussion of the concept of teacher-student classroom communication including the importance, the effectiveness, and problems, it is time to return to a fundamental question—what teachers' roles are in a classroom setting. Classroom communication, functioning as a tool enables teachers to play their roles

effectively. These two concepts are correlated. Therefore, a discussion of teachers' roles in class is essential.

## **2.8 Conceptualizing Teachers' Roles in Class**

The Chinese scholar, Han Yu's work '*Discourse on Teachers (Shishuo)*' is frequently cited by the Chinese to conceptualize teachers' roles in class (Shen & Shun, 2008; Cua, 2013). In the book, teachers' roles in class include teaching students how to be a moral person with high qualities, transmitting knowledge, and solving students' questions and confusion. However, teachers' roles in class have been conceptualized by different researchers from different perspectives. Hence, I first critically evaluate the concept of teachers' roles in class.

Conceptualizing teachers' roles in class based on different types of classes and pedagogies is one of the prevailing way. Keiler (2018) describe teachers' roles in class as what teachers should do and what they should act or behave as in classrooms. According to Keiler (2018), in traditional classes, teachers' roles are as classroom dominators, information providers, and knowledge transmitters. Challenging Keiler (2018), Gutstein (2007) criticizes teachers' roles in traditional classes regarded as disciplinarians and regulation and rule enforcers and defenders. Instead, according to him, teachers' roles in class are supposed to be students' partners, working together with the students instead of being a superior controlling the class. Moustafa, Ben-Zvi-Assaraf, and Eshach (2013) build on this conceptualization by describing teachers' roles in student-centered classes as the advocators of students' autonomy with teachers providing encouragement, and creating a relaxing atmosphere to prompt students' thinking and idea-sharing. This indicates that in student-centered classes, a teacher's role in class is as a guide for the students. Basu and Barton (2010) support this view by illustrating teachers' roles as supporting students rather than dominating them regardless of the class types or pedagogies. Alternatively, Juntunen and Aksela (2013) point out that teachers' roles in inquiry-based classes are guiding questions and guiding students to search for answer. By contrast, in problem-based learning environment, teachers should facilitate, offer guidance and instructions, and demonstrate skills of solving problems for the students (Yukhymenko, Brown, Lawless, Brodowinska & Mullin, 2014).

In addition to the discussion of teachers' roles in class based on different pedagogies and class types, Aghaei, Bavali, and Behjat's (2020: 609) research on this field stands on language teachers' stances and conclude teachers' roles in language classes as 'knowledge transmitter, an artist, a scaffolder, an innovator, a facilitator, a community builder, a caregiver, a cultural mediator', and 'a moral educator'. Adopting an alternative viewpoint, Wan, Low, and Li (2011: 408) explore EFL teachers' roles in class from students' perspectives and summarize the conceptual categories extracting from the data as 'provider, nurturer, devotee, instructor, culture transmitter, authority, interest arouser' and 'co-worker'. When the findings of these two studies are compared, there are overlapping categories concerning EFL teachers' roles in class—1) knowledge transmitter/provider; 2) scaffolder/nurturer; 3) cultural mediator/culture transmitter; 4) an innovator/interest arouser; 5) a facilitator/co-worker.

Firstly, as teachers of all subjects, EFL teachers are supposed to convey knowledge. Secondly, teachers should facilitate students' personal development and growth, and stimulate their potential abilities. This category also indicates that besides academic guidance, teachers should function as a moral model to their students, guiding them to the right direction of life as well. Thirdly, since foreign language learners are exposed to different cultures, teachers should act as culture transmitters as well, explaining and bridging cultural differences. Fourthly, organizing innovative activities and adopting effective pedagogies to motivate students and help them cultivate interest in learning is also teachers' role in class. In this process, teachers work together with students as a facilitator and co-worker, thus creating a harmonious teacher-student relationship in class.

Taking the studies of literature and my developed new understandings into account, I argue that teachers' roles in class can be conceptualized into six aspects including both academic and non-academic categories—1) transmitting knowledge; 2) motivating students; 3) cultivating students' ability of self-learning, problem-solving skills and challenge-facing courage; 4) prompting critical thinking; 5) guiding students into correct directions; 6) providing academic and psychological help and support. I accept that teachers' fundamental roles in class concern academic aspects such as the transmission of knowledge, answering students' questions, introducing culture as a foreign language teacher, and correcting mistakes. However, I contend that teachers' roles in class should not be limited to academic aspects. Students cannot and will not

always rely on teachers. Therefore, helping them develop interest and teaching them how to study, solve problems and deal with challenges and difficulties is of the same importance as well. In addition to the academic support, students' mental development is also significant to their entire life. Hence, teachers' roles in class should also include non-academic aspects such as offering guidance, support, love, care and encouragement when students get lost or confused, pointing out the correct direction, and helping them make changes and become better as a moral person (Hue, 2008). Eventually, students will integrate into society as individuals. Hence, the cultivation of the ability of forming their own ideas towards things is essential so that they will be able to distinguish right from wrong, and make correct judgement and decisions in life. In short, teachers' roles in class are complex, various and integrated. No matter what roles they are, teacher-student communication can never be absent in these processes. Knowledge, encouragement, care, support, and guidance cannot be conveyed without classroom communication. However, my views might not necessarily be replicated by colleagues since this is my personal perspective and it is based on my learning from the literature. Hence, I am interested in exploring the wider understanding of the role of the teacher and its impact on teacher-student classroom communication.

## **2.9 The Conceptual Framework**

The critical discussion of the key context and concepts in the above sections has led to the development of a conceptual framework to guide the empirical stage of the research. The conceptual framework indicates my best attempt at this research stage to demonstrate the ideas learned from the literature that I believe will be important in the research. It also allows me to propose the connections between these ideas which I will go on to explore through the empirical research. It therefore acts as a guide for this empirical work as it underpins my methodological decisions and my analytical thinking. It captures an early attempt to suggest a relationship between the concepts and ideas which helps to explain teacher-student classroom communication.

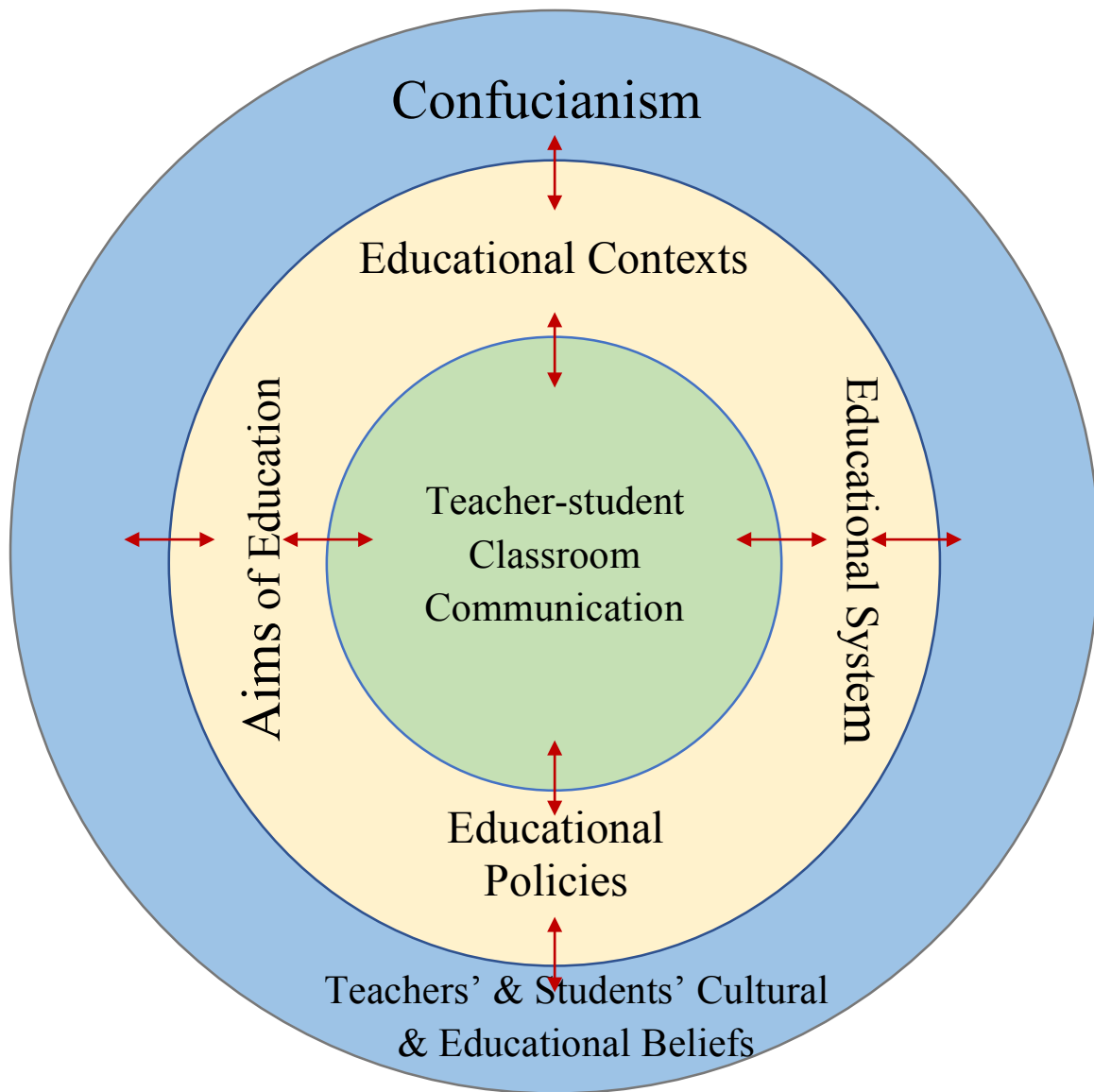


Figure 2.3 *A Conceptual Framework Exploring the Interconnected Concept Relevant to My Study*

The structure of the conceptual framework has been influenced and supported by Bronfenbrenner’s (1994:39) ecological models of human development, in which he regards the ecological environment/context as ‘a set of nested structures, each inside the other like a set of Russian dolls’. I applied the idea to the design of my conceptual framework.

The conceptual framework has three layers. It starts from the outward blue layer, which is the macro background and environment of the research. As was discussed in Chapter 2, the research is conducted in the Chinese context. It is argued in the literature that the Chinese context might have an impact on both teachers’, students’ and my own

cultural and educational beliefs, which ultimately influences how the research is conducted, the findings and the research process. As discussed, influenced by Confucianism, Chinese people believe in hard work, hierarchical status, and learning-by-rote. Moreover, academic achievement is highly valued. In order to achieve academic success, hard work, learning-by-rote and listening carefully to teachers are considered as effective and efficient pedagogical methods. As a result, for a long time, lecture-mode teaching with little argumentation and idea sharing has been enjoying popularity in China. Influenced by the Chinese context, knowledge transmission and teachers' talk are the focuses of classroom communication. However, the literature argues that effective communication between teachers and students in the classroom has different functions, which is of great importance for it has positive influences on teaching and learning. Therefore, the focus of my research is to find out the importance of teacher-student communication in class and the contribution it might make to both teaching and learning. The conceptual framework illustrates my argument that the particular context of the research has a significant impact on effective teacher-student classroom communication. If a same research topic is conducted in a different context, the research strategies, methods, and results might be different because the researcher and participants, and the environment are totally different, leading to different philosophical stances and different impacts on the research process. Therefore, the context is illustrated as the largest circle and placed outward, encircling the whole research.

The second yellow layer represents the educational field including the educational contexts, the aims of education, and Chinese educational system and policies. Education is the key concept of the research. It is put in the second layer because the concept of education is influenced by the outward macro layer. The emphasis of Confucianism is displayed in the concept of education. For instance, teachers generally enjoy a higher social status and students are taught to be respectful to teachers, learning by repetition still prevails and hard work is believed significant to academic success. These beliefs affect educational policy-making decisions and the entire educational system. For example, students' scores in subjects such as Chinese, English, mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, geometry, history and politics are the vital criteria when applying for universities. As a result, the function of classroom communication as a tool of transmitting knowledge is highly valued and



overemphasized. In addition, Chinese people believe that knowledge is passed down from generation to generation and can be acquired by repetitive practice, hard work and listening to teachers. The epistemological stance and educational belief help the teacher-centered lecturing mode which encourages teachers to talk all the time remain popular for years. Therefore, I contend that the outward circle is influential on the educational field. Meanwhile, the educational field reflects the influences of the context, hence the two-way arrow.

The inner green circle indicates the core layer of the research—teacher-student classroom communication. It is the smallest circle because the research topic is one small aspect of the educational field and its position indicates it is influenced by both of the two outer circles. As argued above, the Chinese contexts influence educational field, and the Chinese educational contexts influences teacher-student classroom communication in four aspects: 1) students do not have enough opportunity to talk in teacher-centered lecturing mode classes when teachers talk a lot and students learn by listening attentively; 2) hard work, listening to teachers, and learning-by-rote are believed effective in achieving high scores leading to the neglect of interactive in-class communication between teachers and students such as idea sharing, and the neglect of the importance and positive influences of teacher-student classroom communication; 3) hierarchical status affects equal communication between teachers and students; 4) the emphasis on academic achievement results in the over-emphasis on classroom communication's functioning as a tool of knowledge transmission and the neglect of its functions as building relationships, and motivating students. As discussed, the aims of education are various. Transmitting knowledge is important. However, it is one aspect of classroom communication. The importance of teacher-student classroom communication should not be limited to knowledge transmission. Other functions of classroom communication should be valued as well for they might help students improve learning attitudes and learning might happen in the idea-sharing process. When this issue is understood, more attention can be paid to the importance of classroom communication between teachers and students, the positive influences can be aware of, and Chinese people's educational belief will be changed, which might promote the changes in educational policies.

In between these circles in different colors, there are two-way arrows. These arrows not only interconnect each circle, but indicate the two-way influences among

three circles as well. As discussed, Confucianism, and teachers' and students' educational and cultural beliefs do have a huge impact on every aspect of education and teacher-student classroom communication. At the same time, I argue that communication between teachers and students in the classroom can also affect teaching and learning, thus facilitating the achievement of educational aims. On one hand, classroom communication between teachers and students is not only a tool of knowledge transmission, but also helps to build relationships, trust, and love, create a positive learning atmosphere, stimulate students' interest and engagement in learning, and motivate students. All these functions of teacher-student classroom communication are helpful to teaching and learning. On realizing the importance of teacher-student classroom communication, ultimately, it might change people's educational beliefs and facilitate the improvement of the educational system and policies. In short, they interconnect and react with each other, and this is also a reason why the research topic is important.

The conceptual framework is developed from the argument I am proposing which then forms the basis for the design of my empirical work. It allows me to explore the propositions made in the literature and my response to them through guiding the design of my empirical study.

## **A Summary of the Chapter**

In this chapter, I critically evaluated the impacts of Confucianism on Chinese people's education beliefs, and the practices of teacher-student classroom communication. I then discussed and conceptualized the highly relevant key concepts of the research—the aims of education, communication, teacher-student classroom communication, effective classroom communication between teachers and students, the problems in Chinese and EFL classes, and the roles of a teacher in a classroom setting. As a social activity, teacher-student classroom communication plays an important role in teaching and learning. Effective teacher-student classroom communication is beneficial to both teachers and students. The pedagogical purposes of communication are over-emphasized in Chinese and EFL classes because of the influences of Confucianism and the Chinese context. However, as discussed in this chapter, the aims of education and teachers' roles in class should not be limited to transmitting knowledge. The exploration of the literature allows me to understand this field more

deeply. However, the study within the Chinese context is limited. This research was conducted in the Chinese context, which could fill in the gap and contribute new knowledge to the area. In addition, my identity as an insider researcher can help seek to understand teacher-student classroom communication in an EFL classroom. This points towards the significance and importance of this study. Through the study and critique of the literature, the conceptual framework which will inform my empirical work has been formed and presented.

## **Chapter 3 Methodology**

My study of the literature provides a solid basis for the research design which I will discuss in detail in this chapter. According to Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2013), research design is important for it is a platform for the researcher to articulate and justify that the decisions and choices are reasonable, logical, consistent and feasible in terms of the particular questions I am looking at so that the results are persuasive and reliable. It also allows me to proceed with confidence in my research, knowing that the design of it has been carefully thought through and carried out. My research decisions are based on both my ontological and epistemological stance and what is appropriate for my particular research questions. Drawing on the illustration from Taylor, Bogdan and Devault (2015; 2016), I understand the term methodology as the way the research is conducted and the whole approach to the research. In this chapter I am going to discuss both my methodology, and the research approach I adopted to collect and analyze my data. I understand the term methods as tools to collect data that allows to illuminate the research questions. Justification of my chosen methodology and associated methods are presented in this chapter, and seven aspects of the research design process will be discussed in detail—the philosophical grounding of the research approach, the paradigmatic grounding, the research approach, the data collection method, the analytical approach, the way of reporting the findings, and the ethical concerns.

### **3.1 The Philosophical Grounding of the Research Approach**

The philosophical stance of a researcher refers to profound questions such as who I am, my beliefs about the nature of reality, what the truth, knowledge, and reality are, and how they are acquired, which helps me explain the rationale for my methodological choices, and makes the research decisions and choices more easily understood (Daniel & Harland, 2017; 2018). These ontological and epistemological questions are so fundamental that they urge me to think deeply, drive me towards the research area I am interested in, and alongside the conceptual framework guide me to decide the research design, the selection of research methods, the way of collecting and analyzing data and the data analysis methods (Ryan, 2018).

I understand ontology as a researcher's beliefs and interpretation about knowledge, reality and truth (van Manen, 1998; Bryman, 2008; Daniel & Harland, 2017;

2018). It studies ‘being’ in a philosophical way—the existence of entities and how they are categorized (Jacquette, 2002). Ontology is also argued to be related to the question of whether knowledge is perceived as objective or subjective, and the choices lead to the essence of the philosophy guiding the whole research. Different from ontology, epistemology concerns my beliefs about the nature of knowledge and how the knowledge/reality is acquired by employing various strategies and methods (Polanyi, 1958).

I draw from realism and constructivism to explain my ontological stance as I hold the belief that the universe exists objectively including tangible and intangible entities while the entities we have been known for thousands of years are constructed and interpreted by human beings. I believe it is humans who have constructed the world, named different species, established countries, developed civilization, and given and interpreted meanings (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). Howell (2013) supports my belief that knowledge and reality is about people’s own interpretation of meanings about their feelings, perceptions, attitudes, and experiences. Accordingly, my belief that knowledge and reality is socially constructed and interpreted has an impact on how the research was conceived and conducted. To be more specific, I contend that my philosophical stance supports my belief that knowledge is constructed by the participants and me in the interview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), thus leading to the generation of the data. This research method and the way of data collection aligns with my philosophical stance.

Supported by Crotty (1998), I contend that the underlying philosophical stance always has an impact on my methodological choices. As discussed, constructivism underpins the way I conducted the research. There are three premises of social constructivism (Blumer, 1967). Firstly, people’s behaviors are based on meanings. Secondly, meanings are social products. Thirdly, meanings are interpreted by people. These statements are consistent with my belief. I also agree on what has been noted by Hammersley (2013) that the process leading to the construction should be focused on because in the process, people construct their worlds and the meanings they attribute to their experiences.

I accept the statement that social science is very different from natural science. The way we explore the social world cannot be the same as the way we explore the natural world. Social reality is naturally and potentially multiple and intersubjective in

the world we live in and my participants might provide their particular and unique interpretations, attitudes and viewpoints towards issues (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2013; 2012; 2011). People are complicated, changeable, and diverse (O'Reilly, 2009), and their behaviors, interactions, and phenomenon which are considered subjective factors are the focus of social science. Studies of social science aims at understanding the social world and answering questions that might have different answers (Della Porta & Keating, 2008). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2017: 288) supports the argument by further illustrating that people are considered as meaning-constructing entities and participants' interpretation of meanings are 'culture- and context-bound, and there are multiple realities'. The meanings of their experiences they construct and interpret are complex and various, but they are the core of the knowledge. Reality does not exist as one single event which can be observed (Creswell, 2013). Instead, there are different ways of interpreting it, leading to different interpretations or answers to questions. Since in this human world, meanings are constructed and given by people, they should be interpreted by people as well (Crotty, 1998). I therefore draw on an interpretivist paradigm as an approach. It is a dominant and commonly adopted research paradigm which aims at understanding subjective meanings (Goldkuhl, 2012; Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). The core value of interpretivism is to study the existing subjective meanings in the social world and enable subjective meanings reconstructed, understood and presented and meanwhile avoid the distortion of them during the analysis process. The aim of this kind of research is to interpret and understand participants' feelings and experiences by listening to their stories, and analyzing the data generated from the interaction between researcher and participants (Goldkuhl, 2012; Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2013). This aligns with my research aims.

To summarize, this empirical research focuses on understanding the researched field from the perspectives of those being studied so that potential and practical implications can be objectively put forward to improve teaching and learning. I draw on a social constructivist view of reality to study the multiple realities constructed and co-constructed by the participants and me as a researcher. I intend to interpret the participants' meanings and reveal their understandings of the world they live in. My research topic concerns teacher-student in-class communication. I am interested in understanding three different groups of participants' viewpoints, understandings and attitudes towards the importance, influences and problems of teacher-student classroom

communication. I do not seek for the fixed truths supported by quantitative analysis. Instead, during the process of interaction with the participants, realities are co-constructed and co-produced by the participants and me as a researcher. Through their voices, truths and knowledge can be acquired and their attitudes can be understood. Multiple realities are then interpreted and revealed.

### **3.2 A Paradigmatic Grounding**

Phenomenology provided a paradigmatic grounding for this research since I am interested in the participants' experiences of teacher-student classroom communication. Phenomenology is a major theoretical perspective dominating social science (Bruyn, 1966; Deutscher, 1973 & Creswell, 2012). The intent of the phenomenologist is to understand how the world is experienced from the participants' perspectives (Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault, 2015;2016), which is consistent with my research aims. The essence of phenomenology lies in meaning-making and people's perception of realities. I accept Berger and Luckmann (1967)'s argument that to capture how people define the world and construct realities is the principal task of the phenomenologist.

Referring to this study, as stated, I'm interested in the participants' experiences of communicating with teachers or students in class, thus seeking to understand the importance and positive influences of teacher-student classroom communication on teaching and learning. Although I believe that classroom communication between teachers and students is highly important and effective communication has direct and indirect influences on teaching and learning, I would like to understand and represent individuals' experiences, and explore this phenomenon from the participants' perspectives. Therefore, I have chosen phenomenology as the paradigmatic grounding of my research.

However, as I reflected in Chapter 7, my identity as both an insider and an outsider might have an influence on the research. My identity as an insider appears to be inconsistent with the philosophical viewpoint of phenomenology since the insider identity might have an impact on the research. However, I agree with Heidegger's argument (1962) that both the participants and the researcher are already in the world they are living in. Therefore, preconceptions should be acknowledged and allowed. It is legitimate to allow researchers' preconceptions to exist in the research process and interpret meanings according to the researcher's own beliefs and preconceptions as long

as we acknowledge that this is the case and that we take proper account of it in the tentative nature of the conclusions we draw and the proposals we make. I therefore argue that my insider identity is an advantage allowing me to better understand the participants' experiences and feelings (Heidegger, 1962). The similar or shared experiences enable me to be more empathetic, leading to a better understanding of issues and therefore to a more robust findings and conclusions for research and practice.

### **3.3 Adopting a Qualitative Approach**

Conducting the research in a qualitative way means to explore the empirical world by understanding individual's personal experiences of the issues being researched (Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault, 2015;2016; Habib, Pathik, Maryam & Habib, 2014). I accept Hammersley's definition of qualitative research:

a form of social inquiry that tends to adopt a flexible and data-driven research design, to use relatively unstructured data, to emphasize the essential role of subjectivity in the research process, to study a number of naturally occurring cases in detail, and to use verbal rather than statistical forms of approach.

(Hammersley, 2013: 12)

I take this to mean the purposes of qualitative research, and to clarify how and what kind of data is collected, and the nature of qualitative research. The definition supports the rationale and the appropriateness of my choice of adopting a qualitative approach to conduct this study. As discussed in the above sections, my intention is to explore the participants' personal feelings, attitudes, viewpoints and experiences of teacher-student classroom communication in depth. The in-depth exploration relies on the participants' views. I contend that qualitative research can support me to seek for the knowledge I wish to acquire and aligns with my world view and philosophical position. Furthermore, in qualitative research, things are studied in natural settings. As Denzin and Lincoln (2013) explain, the interpretive meanings and practices of qualitative research make realities visible to both researchers and readers. It therefore has the potential to support me to learn more about my research questions and the focus of my research. To be more persuasive, three reasons for my decision are further illustrated as follows.

Firstly, standing from the interpretivist paradigm, each person has a unique understanding and interpretation towards the same phenomenon and the exploration of



his/her understanding is a researcher's focus in qualitative research. As mentioned, I'm concerned with the meanings made by the participants in relation to their experiences and lives in context (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Qualitative approach allows me to achieve my research aims and objectives as shared in Chapter 1, to listen to participants and to gather the descriptive data I'm seeking for.

Secondly, this research is concerned with people. People and social world are fluid, unpredictable and complex rather than static. Therefore, I accept Wellington's (2000) argument that people should not be put into a laboratory with instruments and measurements precisely controlling variables and constants, thus generating numerical data through a quantitative approach. Instead, more people-oriented qualitative research is more appropriate to use words as data to describe, explain, report, interpret, and create concepts, and generate theories (Bryman, 2008; Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Lastly, drawing on the philosophy of constructivism, realities are multiple. Therefore, there are various and flexible ways to investigate them. Qualitative research allows a flexible research design to conduct research and explore into the researched field.

However, the quality, validity, credibility, subjectivity and generalizability of qualitative research has been constantly questioned for decades (Hammersley, 2007; Atkins & Wallace, 2012). Criticism of qualitative research's being subjective and relying too much on individuals' personal responses has always been existing (Atkins & Wallace, 2012). Nevertheless, as Hammersley (2013) emphasizes when defining qualitative research, I consider subjectivity as being inevitable in the qualitative research process. As stated, I focus on participants' subjective accounts and interpretations of their lived experiences instead of statistical measurement. Different methods and strategies should be adopted to discover the multiple realities. In addition to the subjectivity issue, qualitative research is also challenged by the issue that researchers' own values, beliefs might cause biases, thus resulting in the distortion of the findings and results because researchers inevitably live in the world being researched (Atkinson, 2006). Taking this bias issue into consideration, I decided to adopt a reflexive approach to the study for the proper use of reflexivity and a research journal may help ensure and increase rigor and validity of data collection and analysis leading to more credible findings and results (Berger, 2015). As Finlay (2002) suggests, I wrote the reflexive journal to self-examine and critique my way of doing the research

and how my identities and positions might influence the study. On one hand, Wright's (1978) work supports my argument that our life experience can be used to illuminate the way of doing the research. On the other hand, reflections facilitate self-awareness of the potential risk of biases and allow me to address these risks of biases through my reflexive approach. Lastly, as to generalizability which is another frequently challenged point of qualitative research, supported by Larsson (2009), generalization is not an indispensable concern of qualitative research. The purpose of qualitative research is not for widespread generalizations, but to extrapolate individual stories to provide tentative evidence for a type of theory-making. Data is generated from the interaction and communication between researchers and participants and then truths are acquired via reading and familiarizing the data, reconstructing meanings, coding and synthesizing themes. Through this process I come to understand the participants' meanings.

In summary, drawing upon what has been learned from the literature, my personal values and beliefs, my philosophical positions, and what I'm interested in and seeking for, I decided to adopt a qualitative approach to conduct the research. I accept it as an inductive process to reasoning and theorizing (O'Reilly & Bone, 2009; 2008). This will be further discussed in the analytical approach section. In the next section, I will make an argument for my choice of the research method.

### **3.4 Research Method**

Qualitative methods such as interview, observation and focus group are frequently adopted in many fields of social science for these methods facilitate the generation of descriptive and rich data (Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault, 2015; 2016) and allow underlying meanings to be discovered (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Data are collected, analyzed, interpreted, and reported by observing what participants say and how they act. Drawing upon the learning from literature and the experience gained from the pilot studies, I decided to use interview as a method. Knowledge is co-constructed and obtained via interviews when participants tell me about the happenings, their understandings, and feelings. Data is collected based on participants' narrations. As emphasized, in this research, what I want to know is what happens in the classroom concerning teachers, students, communications, experiences, feelings and behaviors. To find out the importance, the influences, and the problems of classroom communication between teachers and students, and where the differences of native and

non-native English language teachers in terms of their practices of communication with their students lie in, my participants were interviewed so that their stories and experiences were shared, meanings were interpreted and voices were heard (Habib, Pathik, Maryam & Habib, 2014). Thus, the multiple truths and knowledge in terms of what happens in an English language class and the significance of teacher-student classroom communication can be acquired.

For years, interview has been frequently employed in qualitative research (Briggs, 1986; Alvesson, 2002; Atkins & Wallace, 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2017; Ward & Delamont, 2020). However, since there are various and flexible ways of investigating realities in qualitative research, before I decided interview as the research method, I had tried different research methods to examine which one could best illuminate my research questions, acquire the knowledge I was seeking for, and uncover the realities concerning the researched area. Meanwhile, the trialing of different research methods provided me with an opportunity to develop my techniques, skills and experience of doing the research, and make better choices of the research method based on the experience. I therefore begin by this section with a discussion of my learning from the pilot studies since lots of my learning came from undertaking the pilot studies and I would therefore discuss it before moving on further in the discussion of the adopted research method. Five aspects are covered in this section: 1) a brief introduction of my learning from the pilot studies; 2) the advantages and disadvantages of interview; 3) the reasons why interview was decided to be the research method; 4) designing interview type and questions; 5) deciding the sampling strategies and a brief introduction of the participants' background.

### **3.4.1 Learning from the Pilot Studies**

Although I had referred to the literature, I was unsure if the research methods I had chosen would allow the generation of rich data to address my research questions and correspond with what I was seeking for.

Through exploring the literature of different research methods, I had selected interview, observation and questionnaire as the research methods for this study. Therefore, I conducted two rounds of observations, one round of questionnaire, and three rounds of pilot interviews. I followed the University of Hertfordshire application procedures of ethics both in the pilot studies and the data collection for the main study.

Before conducting the pilot studies and the data collection for the main study, as requested, I had applied for and acquired the ethical approval from UH and got the protocol number.

### *Pilot Observations*

Observation is commonly used in qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). As a research tool, observation enables the researcher to obtain first-hand and ‘live’ data (Wellington, 2015: 247), check whether what people say and what they do are consistent (Robson, 2002), and look at vivid behaviors and interactions that might be taken for granted, neglected, or ignored (Cooper & Schindler, 2001). Although observation is criticized as ‘highly subjective’ (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015: 138), its strength still outweighs its weakness—more authentic data can be collected via a more perceptual involvement in the situation. Since the research topic is about classroom communication, I had assumed that sitting in a classroom would allow me to better and more clearly observe the interaction between teachers and students from various angles. The risk of missing details concerning what teachers and students say, how they communicate in class, and even nonverbal communication could be reduced. These considerations explained why I conducted pilot observations.

As suggested by Bryman (2008), my first round of observation was a structured one with a prepared schedule and explicit categories. The participants’ behaviors were not directly observed in the classroom but were observed through two videos because I was in U.K. while another participant was in China at the time of the pilot study was conducted. The main focus of the observations was the teacher-student verbal communication in both English and Chinese. Since one participant was myself, there was no follow-up interview. There was a follow-up interview with another participant to explore more deeply into what he thought of the importance of classroom communication between the teacher and the students.

Since the first round of observation was conducted via a video recorded in advance for the purpose of a teaching skill competition, authenticity was a problem because both the teacher and the students were informed of the importance of the competition. Taking this into account, different from the first round, in the second round, five on-the-spot, and structured observation with five participants were conducted. Five authentic classes were observed and the focus was ‘how non-native English speaker

language teachers communicate with their students in an English as a second language class'. These five pilot observations were also highly structured with a prepared schedule and explicit categories to observe. All the teacher participants had been informed of the observation before the class while the students had been not informed. Different from the first-round pilot observations, field reflections were kept for each class observation.

After two rounds of observations, I reflected on whether this method was able to address my research questions. Referring to the advantages of observation, as Wellington (2015) and Creswell (2012) argue, first-hand data can be acquired, the taken-for-granted ideas can be avoided via on-the-spot observation, the neglected or ignored can be made up for during the observation process, and unexpected aspects might occur, prompting thinking. However, the disadvantages were critical reasons leading to my determination to not use this research method. Firstly, what had been observed did not have direct correlation to effective classroom communication. Secondly, referring to my research questions for the overall research, answers to the questions could not be obtained via observing what teachers and students say and behave in class. In terms of teacher-student classroom communication, I could only notice what happened on the surface, but the underlying realities could not be known via observation. Lastly, observation did not allow me to 'understand' but to 'observe'. In the English language classes I observed, I could only see what happened rather than understand the potential meanings or the participants' attitudes towards the importance of classroom communication between teachers and students in relation to their experiences. Despite the fact that observation was not a suitable research method for this study, what I learned from the pilot observations helped me to build more confidence in the chosen research method, do differently and make improvements in the main study. Firstly, field reflections and field notes were effective and useful tools in data collection process, which could be applied not only in observations but also in interviews as well. Secondly, the follow-up interview after the observation demonstrated that in-depth data could be obtained through interviews.

### *Pilot Questionnaire*

The decision to trial of a questionnaire emerged after completing the pilot observation and interview. I decided to trial the questionnaire because I wanted to find

out whether it could help me to better understand the participants' attitudes, interpretations and experiences. The pilot questionnaire was designed to ask for student participants' responses to one aspect of relevant to the research questions: 'What are the students' attitudes towards communicating with native and non-native English speaker language teachers?'

The questionnaire was handed out to 30 student participants from one of my EFL classes. Since it was handed out face-to-face instead of via email or mail, and the participants were my students, all of them were easily returned and collected with valid data. With regard to the trial, I had experienced both the advantages and disadvantages of a questionnaire.

Firstly, consistent with Patten's (2016) argument, a questionnaire proves to be a highly efficient and economical way of data collection. Highly-structured questionnaire questions are usually easy, direct and straightforward for participants. The quick-completion feature also saves both participants' and researchers' time. Secondly, a questionnaire can reach a large number of participants via various channels. Nevertheless, as stated at the beginning of this section, this advantage is not helpful to this study since I do not aim at the widespread generalization of the results. Thirdly, the self-completion feature of the questionnaire helps the participants avoid embarrassment and tension occurring in face-to-face interviews (Brace, 2018). When participants are in a face-to-face talk, they might feel awkward and uneasy especially confronted with sensitive questions. Consequently, their responses might not be what they really think. A questionnaire is able to reduce this kind of risk, thus resulting in more authentic responses. Fourthly, the numerical data generated is comparatively more straightforward to analyze and less time-consuming. Lastly, unlike an interview, a questionnaire ensures that the same question is asked in the same way. In interviews, the same question might be asked differently, which might bring about the problem of different understanding of the same questions (Brace, 2018).

However, there are a few disadvantages of this method. The most difficult part is the design of the questions. No matter what kind of questions they are, it tends to limit participants' thoughts since the questions are highly-structured. The choices or the scales are set in advance. Participants do not have the opportunity to disapprove or disagree with any of them. Being highly-structured is both a strength and a challenge. Another weakness is that participants might not respond seriously or carefully since it

is a self-completion process without the researcher being present. Providing only a 'snapshot' (Patten, 2016: 3) with limited responses is the third defect of a questionnaire. The details of participants' attitudes, reasons, and interpretations cannot be known. Drawing upon what have been learned in the pilot questionnaire, although there were various advantages, these two weaknesses were fatal to my research because I was seeking for participants' in-depth sharing of their attitudes and ideas in relation to life experiences concerning teacher-student classroom communication rather than simple responses such as 'yes' or 'no'.

With the experiences of conducting the pilot questionnaire and the consideration of the focus and the aims of my research, I decided not to adopt a questionnaire as a research method. The aim of the research is not to generalize with a large sample, but to listen to participants' stories and voices of their attitudes towards the importance of teacher-student classroom communication and their interpretations of the influences of it. Therefore, although questionnaires have many advantages, it is not an appropriate fit for the aims and objectives of my research.

### *Pilot Interviews*

In addition to pilot observations and questionnaire, I conducted three rounds of pilot interviews involving different participants prior to the data collection of the main study. All of them were semi-structured interviews. Unlike the first-round and the second-round pilot interviews, the third-round pilot interviews were conducted online due to the Covid-19 pandemic. These three rounds of pilot interviews aimed at finding whether interview fits well into the study, improving my interview skills and techniques, and trying interview questions from different angles to inform the construction of my final interview questions to collect more valid data. As learned from the pilot observations, reflections were kept in a journal after each interview.

The pilot interviews proved that it was an effective and useful method when studying issues in depth (Patton, 2002). When participants swayed away from the focus, they could always be drawn back by the researcher via asking questions. The data generated was rich and in-depth. And the open-ended questions enabled the participants to express their ideas, and talk about their feelings, experiences, stories, and attitudes freely. These advantages are what observation and questionnaire lack. However, the disadvantages of interview were also noticed. During the interview process, in order to

encourage talking from the participants, I posed questions. Although I attempted to ensure that I remained neutral and avoided asking questions that might have potential risk of guiding the participants, the risk might not be completely eliminated. The second disadvantage is about the selection of participants. The selection of the participants might rely on my personal likes and dislikes. I had been inclined to select the colleagues who I trusted and had a good relationship with the participant. As I noticed the problem, it was avoided and improvements of sampling strategy was made in the interviews for the main study, which will be further discussed in the sampling section. Lastly, interviews are time-consuming and the rich data makes transcription, translation and analysis time-consuming as well. In spite of the disadvantages, I contend that interview is a useful and effective tool to collect the data I am seeking for.

However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic happening in 2020, face-to-face human communication was replaced by online communication via word messages or audio and video meetings. Consequently, the approach of doing the research was greatly influenced and had to be changed. In order to fit into the change, I trialed two online audio interviews to replace face-to-face interviews. Unexpectedly, both of the participants talked about their feeling more comfortable when being interviewed via an audio call instead of a video call or face-to-face talk by saying '*I feel a bit awkward and nervous if I turn on the camera*', and another participant felt '*free and comfortable to say anything while face-to-face interview is more awkward*' and she added, '*if I'm interviewed in a group, I may keep silent*'. Their viewpoints illuminated the possibility of conducting online interviews which I had not taken into account previously. This will be further discussed in Chapter 4.

The trial of different research methods is important especially in qualitative research which often adopts a flexible way to conduct the research. The trial provided me with an opportunity to test the suitability of the methods. Drawing upon what have been learned from the pilot observations, questionnaire and interviews, interview is the research method which fits well into the study for it aligns with my philosophical position and it helps me to gain the in-depth responses to my research questions.



### **3.4.2 The Advantages and Disadvantages of Interview**

Based on the experiences of pilot interviews, and the study of literature, I have reflected on and critically evaluated the advantages and disadvantages of an interview so that I could better employ this research method to collect valid and credible data.

I accept Dexter's (1970) argument that an interview is a kind of conversation between two or more people with a specific purpose of acquiring information and messages. When people's behavior, feelings, attitudes, and their interpretations of meanings and the world are to be studied, interview is an effective, efficient and essential method since this kind of data cannot be obtained via observation. Meanwhile, when past events or experiences are the research objects, they cannot be replicated and interview is also a good choice under the circumstances. Kvale's (1996) work extends the argument by describing interview as the process of information extraction and knowledge co-constructing. The description of splitting the word interview into 'inter' and 'view' illustrates this research method vividly (Kvale, 1996: 14). According to this interpretation, the word 'interview' itself has already clarified its prominent feature—the exchange of views between the researcher and the participants on a specified topic, in which knowledge is generated. In this sense, knowledge is constructed by both the researcher and the participants. This is supported by Laing (1967) and Walford (2001). Nevertheless, Cannell and Kahn (1968), and Dyer (1995) warn that different from everyday dialogues, interview involves a conversation with the purpose of collecting data via verbal interaction on designed questions while daily dialogues are conducted in a more casual way. Learning from the literature assures that interview is an appropriate method which can help me achieve my research aims and acquire the data I wish to collect. To summarize, I decided to adopt interview as the research method for two purposes: 1) to acquire insight into people's beliefs, attitudes, feelings, values, and interpretation of meanings (Tuckman, 1972); 2) to serve as a follow-up to explore more detailed information that questionnaires or surveys fail to obtain (Kerlinger, 1970). For this research, the overarching purpose of using interviews is to acquire information on the topic of teacher-student classroom communication. Along with literature and the experiences of pilot interviews, I now move on to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of interview approach for my study.

Referring to the advantages of interview, as experienced in the pilot interviews, the fundamental one is that rich data can be generated during the interaction process

between the researcher and the participant (Delamont, 2012). Compared with survey, interviews enable me to directly interact with participants so that I can be always able to ask for more details about facts, viewpoints, opinions, personal experiences and stories, attitudes, feelings, interpretations of meanings, and histories (Borg, 1963). Meanwhile, the participants can also have the opportunity to talk freely. As a result, a large amount of data will emerge from the conversation, which helps to answer research questions (Atkins & Wallace, 2012). Another strength of interview is that it allows in-depth exploration into issues to understand what, how and why my participants think and behave in those ways, which cannot be achieved via surveys (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997; Hochschild, 2009). Supported by Brinkmann and Kvale (2014), interview is a better choice when thick description and deep exploration are required. Moreover, since participants are able to express themselves freely, there are chances that unexpected insights and ideas might emerge from the conversation, which might enlighten research and prompt thinking from a different angle. Furthermore, the assurance of participants' understanding of the questions and researchers' understanding of participants' meanings is also a benefit of interview (Atkins & Wallace, 2012; Delamont, 2012). The face-to-face mutual interaction sets up a great platform for researcher and participant to communicate without time or space limitation. As experienced in the pilot interviews, when participants' misunderstandings or problems of understanding occurred, research questions could always be explained or asked in a different way and in simple words to make sure they were correctly and fully understood. When I was not sure about the participants' meanings, I could check either in or after the interview. It is useful to increase credibility of data. Meanwhile, it also helps to reduce the risk of the emergence of taken-for-granted ideas via probing deeper into participants' standpoints from all aspects. The dialogue enables me to encourage my participants to talk, which helps their voices and judgements to be heard. Additionally, an interview is also a flexible tool for data collection because 'multi-sensory channels' can be used (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2017: 506). For instance, data can be collected via verbal and non-verbal communication, feeling, hearing, and seeing. The last advantage of interview is the videoing or audio recording, which is helpful and useful during the following transcribing and data analysis process. When there is uncertainty, it can always be played backwards to have a check from the video

or audio recording. However, as suggested by Atkins and Wallace (2012), the disadvantages of this method also need to be considered.

As mentioned in the above section, rich data can be generated from interview. It is not only an advantage, but a disadvantage as well for it makes the transcribing work and data analysis rather time-consuming (Atkins & Wallace, 2012). Participants' various responses make it tedious to distinguish relevant data from irrelevant information, and categorizing and synthesizing it into themes are also time- and energy-consuming tasks. As a matter of fact, interviewing itself also takes a lot of time. Moreover, according to Cicourel (1964), factors such as power differential, relationship (mutual trust) between researcher and participant, and personal state cannot be within rational control. These factors might result in participants' feeling nervous, uneasy, awkward, distrustful or worried. It might cause three problems: 1) being too polite to tell the truth; 2) being not willing to tell the truth; 3) avoiding being questioned deeply especially for sensitive questions. When the participants do not trust the researcher, or the relationship is sensitive such as teacher and student, or superior and subordinate, all of the above situations might happen because the participants might be worried that if they tell the truths, it might be harmful to their benefits. For this particular study, the existence of power differential between teacher and student is a threat to idea sharing. Moreover, both the teacher and student participants might be worried or uncomfortable to talk about their experiences or attitudes especially negative ones. In the pilot interviews, I had noticed the power differential. Therefore, I talked in a more patient, sincere, gentle and friendly way and emphasized my identity as a researcher instead of a teacher. The participants might also be worried what they shared would do harm to their benefits or privacy. I assured the participants of the storage and the use of the data repeatedly in the pilot interviews. Additionally, as I reflected in the pilot interviews, the third weakness of interview is that when participants are silent, the risk of guiding participants increases if the researcher keep asking questions to encourage them to talk. Under the circumstances, what is presented might be the researcher's assumption instead of the participant's voice. Hence, the high requirement of researcher's interview skills and techniques is another potential disadvantage for it might influence the results. Since '*researchers are the instruments of the research*' (Eisner, 1991; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2017: 289), the quality of the data is determined by researchers' interview skills to a large extent. This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4 since I realized the

importance of this issue in the pilot study and improvements were made in the main study.

The above discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of interview for my research project helps me thoroughly understand this research method and made a good argument for the use of interviews. I then move on to the designing of the interview questions.

### **3.4.3 Deciding Interview Type and Questions**

Prior to collecting data, I made decisions on the interview type and questions, which is the focus of this section.

#### *Interview Type*

Drawing upon the literature, there are different classifications of types of interviews according to different purposes, features and ways of conducting interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). LeCompte and Presissle (1993) divide interviews into six types including standardized interviews, in-depth interviews, ethnographic interviews, elite interviews, life history interviews and focus group interviews. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) add semi-structured interviews and group interviews to the category. Based on Bogdan and Biklen (1992), Lincoln and Guba (1985) add one more type—structured interviews. Different types of interviews serve different purposes of research. I accept Kvale (1996) and Wellington's (2015) argument that the research purposes such as whether it aims at generalization which requires a large number of responses and whether it aims at an in-depth exploration of issues to indicate participants' unique feelings or attitudes decide the openness of questions and what type of interviews is to be conducted. Supported by Lincoln and Guba (1985), as I intend to gain unique, personalized, and emotion-focused data, unstructured interviews with open-ended questions fit better.

Considering my research topic, and what have been learned from the literature and the pilot study, I decided to conduct semi-structured interviews for four reasons. Firstly, unstructured interviews are more suitable to in-depth exploration because open-ended questions allow participants to share and talk freely. Secondly, compared with other types of interviews mentioned in the literature, the four principal features of semi-structured interviews allow me to effectively and efficiently collect valid data. There

are two points concerning the appropriate interview type learned from the pilot interviews worth discussing. On one hand, structured questions had been prepared as the interview guide, which allowed both the participants and me to be clear about the focus of the conversation and enabled the interviews to be conducted in a well-organized way. On the other hand, all of the questions were flexible so that the participants were encouraged to talk. The third reason supporting my choice of a semi-structured interview is that participants are expected to provide specific data referring to topics to avoid straying away from the topic and generate a large quantity of invalid data when there is an interview guide. Lastly, there is no standard or expectation of the wording of participants' responses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), indicating that the participants are allowed to contribute in the way they feel comfortable. Semi-structured interviews were proved to be effective and efficient to collect valid data for the pilot interviews. Therefore, I decided to adopt semi-structured interviews as the method for this research.

### *Interview Questions*

I take Merriam and Tisdell's (2015) argument that asking good interview questions is fundamental to collecting good and valid data. How questions are phrased and formatted so that they can be easily understood and avoid misunderstandings, and how to design questions which allow the researcher to explore specific and in-depth details are key points in designing interview questions since different questions yield different responses and information (Wilson, 1996). The pilot interviews provided an opportunity for me not only to practice and try out different interview questions but also reword and reframe questions so as to reduce useless data. The eight interview questions derived from the research questions are illustrated in Table 3.1 below.

<b>Interview Questions</b>
1. What is the importance of teacher-student classroom communication?
2. In what aspects is it important/why is it unimportant?
3. What are the differences between native and non-native English language speaker teachers in terms of their practices of classroom communication?
4. Which group of teachers have more communication problems with students?
5. Have you encountered any communication conflict? (Talk about your experiences if there is any)
6. What are the perceived causes of classroom communication problems?
7. What are the negative impacts of classroom communication problems (if there is any)?
8. What are the positive impacts of effective teacher-student communication on you as a teacher/student?

Table 3.1 *Interview Questions for the Main Study*

The first two interview questions allow me to answer the first research question concerning the importance of teacher-student classroom communication. My second research question about the differences between native and non-native English language teachers can be answered via asking the participants the third and the fourth interview questions. The interview questions 5, 6, 7 enable me to seek for answers to my third research question referring to the perceived causes and negative impacts of communication problems. The last interview question is consistent with my last research question aiming at understanding the positive impacts of effective teacher-student communication on teaching and learning. These questions align with the focus and aims of the research, and allow me to explore deeply into this field, listen to different voices, and develop a better understanding of the issues.

After the interview type and the interview questions have been decided and designed, the next choice concerning data collection is ‘who to interview’. The selection of participants is significant and crucial to the research. Therefore, in the next section, my decision of sampling strategies and the selected participants’ background information will be discussed in detail.

### **3.4.4 Sampling Strategies and a Brief Introduction of the Participants' Background**

#### *Sampling Strategies*

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2017) illustrate the significance of the sampling strategy in their assertion that in addition to the suitability of methodology and research methods, the sample strategy employed is another important element that decides the quality of research. Hence, the decisions of sampling strategy should be carefully made.

I refer to Uprichard's (2013) suggestion that the sampling strategy to be used are influenced by different aspects such as the ontological and epistemological perspectives of the researcher. For example, what kind of knowledge the researcher wishes to gain from the sample affects sample selection decisions. Sampling strategy is also influenced by the choice of methodology and whether the purpose is generalization or seeking for unique and in-depth understanding of issues. Basically, there are two dominating types of sampling which include probability and nonprobability sampling (Cohen & Holliday, 1979; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Probability sampling is generally adopted in quantitative research, which targets a large sample size to generalize the results. As I adopt a qualitative approach, statistical data is not the goal, which indicates that a probability sampling strategy is not suitable. On the contrary, nonprobability sampling is more commonly used in qualitative research. Honigmann (1982) and Chein (1981) claim that nonprobability sampling strategy is a logical method if the researcher wishes to discover what happens, and understand participants' insight instead of calculate numbers or frequencies, which supports my choice of this sampling strategy. I contend that the core of it is the belief in in-depth study of particular cases with rich information. The uniqueness of each participant is emphasized and such a sampling approach is therefore appropriate.

When making sampling decisions, I took factors such as sample size, feasibility, sample selection, access and representativeness into consideration and made them carefully examined.

When adopting non-probability sampling strategy in qualitative research, deciding sample size is always difficult for there is no specific standard and the criteria to judge whether the sample size fits well for the purpose of the research. As argued by Marshall and Rossman (2016), the sample size, whether small or big, is the researcher's choice. This makes the question of how many people to be interviewed rather difficult.

It depends on what kind of information and data to acquire, what questions to ask, and the purpose of the research. I accept Onwuegbuzie and Leech's (2007) suggestion that in qualitative research, the sample size should facilitate the generation of rich and thick data whilst I also take Lincoln and Guba's (1985: 202) recommendation that the sample size is decided by 'informational considerations'. When there is no new information generated, saturation point is reached. In this case, there's no need to add more sample (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). As for this research, the sample size has been modified based on the experience of the pilot interviews. Since the research topic is teacher-student classroom communication in English language classes, it appears that this topic involves two groups of 'sample'—teacher and student. In Chapter 1, the EFL classes in the university I work within are introduced. There are two different groups of English language teachers—native and non-native English speaker teachers. Hence, the 'sample' for the study is divided into three groups instead of two (teacher and student) because I wish to explore the issue from different angles. These three groups include native English speaker language teachers, non-native English speaker language teachers, and students. The original decision of the sample size of this research was 35, which involved 10 native English speaker language teachers, 10 non-native English speaker language teachers and 15 students. Before the pilot interviews, the number had been considered maximal, practical and feasible. However, learning from the experience of pilot interviews, the sample size is too big in my case since the data generated from such a big sample size exceeds data saturation. Each interview requires enormous time and energy. In addition, interview is rather time-consuming and the rich data makes the following data collection and analysis even harder and seemingly impossible to complete. Hence, taking the fact into consideration, the sample size was eventually reduced to 13 including 5 native English speaker language teachers, 4 non-native English speaker language teachers and 4 students. The literature led me to believe that this sample size was adequate to answer my research questions. In addition, drawing upon the experience of pilot interviews, this allows the generation of rich and adequate data to illuminate the research questions.

Following the decision of the sample size comes the selection of the sample. This is also a great challenge for all researchers because who to interview is not easy to decide, the justification for the choice is hard, and it directly influences the results since all the data comes from the selected participants (Atkins & Wallace, 2012). The selected



participants are the significant basis in the sampling and data collection process, and meanwhile they contribute to the overarching property of the research. I refer to Delamont's (2012) suggestion that when selecting participants, factors such as representativeness, access and bias must be considered. Generally, due to the relatively small sample size in qualitative research, questions are always raised about how a small sample size can represent a large population. As clarified, I support that the emphasis and pursuit of qualitative research is uniqueness rather than generalization. Each participant is viewed as a particular case and unique individual, and each participant represents himself/herself. Supported by McCracken (1988), I contend that the aim of the research is to explore certain voices of particular groups instead of representing the whole world. If the findings can be applied to other groups or can represent a large population, then it is 'a bonus rather than a necessity' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017:223;224). The second important factor of selecting who to interview is the access. I learned from the pilot interviews that the targeted participants simply might not have enough time or they might not be willing to be interviewed due to various reasons. The access of potential participants decides the feasibility. I also took my personal bias into account when selecting the sample. In the pilot studies, as mentioned, I was more inclined to choose those who had a close relationship with me. The advantage was that we had mutual trust so that the information acquired was highly credible due to their willingness to share. Moreover, the mutual trust also made the participants less stressed and self-defensive, thus leading to easier in-depth exploration into the issues. The disadvantage was that people who were close were more likely to share similar ideas and attitudes, preventing me as a researcher from hearing from different voices and angles. To summarize, taking all the above factors into consideration, when selecting the participants, I followed the procedure: 1) check out whether the potential participants have enough time and whether their time coordinates my interview schedule; encouraging volunteers; 2) ask for the acceptance and permission from the potential participants; giving them adequate information with which to make informed consent (Appendix 1; Appendix 2); 3) among the accessible ones, select teacher participants according to their teaching experiences, and nationalities; randomly pick out the student numbers to decide student participants; 4) make inquiries in-person to double-check the time and acceptance of the decided participants. When deciding teacher participants, teaching experiences and nationalities are carefully considered for

the sake of diversity of the sample. Since communication in an English language class is the issue to be studied, both Chinese and English are communication tools in the classroom. Students' English levels vary from person to person. Students in English language class are numbered according to their English scores in national college entrance examination. The smaller the number is, the higher English scores they have and vice versa. There are both small and big student numbers in the random selection. Random selection of their student numbers is fair to ensure diversity. To ensure random selection, the student participants were selected from all the students I was teaching at the time when the interviews were conducted. To illustrate more specifically, figure 3.1 presents my chosen sampling strategies and the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

<b>Non-probability Sampling Strategies with Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria</b>				
<b>Sampling Strategies</b>	<b>Purposeful Sampling</b>	<b>Convenience Sampling</b>	<b>Self-selection Sampling</b>	<b>Volunteer Sampling</b>
<b>Purposes</b>	To focus on issues and access to those who have experiences in relation to the issues (Teddie & Yu, 2007)	To allow the researcher to choose the available and accessible participants so as to save time, energy, money cost (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2017)	To allow the researcher specify criteria for inclusion and exclusion based on personal will (Berndt, 2020)	To encourage those who are interested in the research topic to share ideas (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2017)
<b>Sample Size</b>	4 native English speaker language teachers; 4 non-native English speaker language teachers; 4 students			
<b>Inclusion Criteria</b>	Colleagues (English language teachers) and students will be included if: they are interested in the research topic; they are available and accessible; they volunteer to be a participant; they feel comfortable to be interviewed.			
<b>Exclusion Criteria</b>	Colleagues (English language teachers) and students will be excluded if: they are not interested in the research topic; they are not available or accessible; they are not willing to share their experiences; they feel uncomfortable to be interviewed.			

Figure 3.1 *the Chosen Sampling Strategies and the Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

### *A Brief Introduction of the Participants' Background*

Although I clarified the sampling strategies in the above section, there is one other issue worth discussing, which is the terms native and non-native English speaker used in the thesis. The participants' linguistic and cultural background is complex, which is essential to discuss within the context.

As mentioned in different chapters, there are three different groups of participants involved in this research. To name these groups is a challenge because there are a few alternative terms to choose from. 'Chinese teachers', 'foreign teachers', and 'Chinese students' are the terms I selected initially and they might be considered the simplest ones. However, reviewing the school history, I noticed that there were teachers who were able to speak both Chinese and English and recruited as 'Chinese teachers'. There were teachers who were Chinese but born in other countries and these teachers were recruited as 'foreign teachers'. Moreover, there were international students whose first language was not Chinese and they were classified into ordinary classes rather than international classes. But this rarely happens in the university I work within. The student participants I recruited were all born in China and their first language are Chinese. However, the background of the teacher participants I recruited is diverse. Considering the complexity, using the terms 'Chinese' and 'foreign' is not appropriate.

Drawing upon the literature, the terms 'native' and 'non-native' are recommended (Medgyes, 1992; Hackert, 2012;2013; Nymeyer, Dewey, Eggington & Baker-Smemoe, 2022). However, these two terms are also frequently challenged because they are criticized as being stereotypical and discriminative (Selvi, 2010; Charles, 2019, Kir, 2022). 'Native' and 'non-native' fail to describe English language teachers' complexity and diverse identities (Faez, 2011; Aneja, 2016). Extending the criticism, Holliday (2008) further argues that it is difficult to categorize and define who are native speakers because this is not only a linguistic matter but also an ideological question. Referring to the literature, there are different ways of defining native English speakers. For instance, Medgyes (2001) put emphasis on where and whom teachers teach; Davies (2003) refers to people's linguistic abilities as the judgement of whether they can be defined as native English speakers; Liu (1999: 100) focuses on people's 'competence in English, cultural self-identification, social environment and political labeling' when defining native and non-native English speakers.

In spite of the different voices, I took the following aspects into account. The priority of the choice of the terms is avoiding misunderstanding and ambiguity. My second consideration is to precisely describe and define these groups within the Chinese and the EFL context. Lastly, my decision was also based on the criteria of the recruitment of faculties of the university I work within. Therefore, I decided to use the terms of native and non-native English speakers to label different groups of the participants. I define native English speakers as those who were born into and growing up in an English-speaking community and whose first language is English. This is supported by Hackert (2012;2013). Those who do not meet the criteria are defined as non-native English speakers. As a result, the teacher participants are labelled as native and non-native English speaker language teacher participants, and the students are labelled as non-native English speaker students. There are two teacher participants who were Chinese but born in Australia and Canada. Their first language is English and they were recruited as foreign teachers (native English speaker teachers) who were responsible for different English language courses. According to the definition and criteria, they were named as ‘native English speaker language teachers’. I use these terms throughout the entire thesis to maintain consistency and avoid misunderstandings rather than to discriminate English language teachers and English language learners. The details of the participants’ linguistic information will be provided in Chapter 4.

This whole section clarifies the rationale for the chosen research method and the decisions made in relation to the research method such as the interview type, the interview questions, the sampling strategies and a brief introduction of the participants’ background on the basis of what I have learned from the literature and the pilot studies. In short, interview is a method aligning with my beliefs and allows me to collect the data I am seeking for and illuminate my research questions. However, it is also a demanding research method that requires me to be very cautious, equipped with skilled interviewing techniques and take details into consideration to increase rigor. Following data collection, the next important choice to be made is the data analysis approach. In the next section, the analytical approach will be justified in detail.

### **3.5 A Justification of the Analytical Approach**

Prior to starting analyzing the data, it is important to make wise decisions on what suitable data analysis method to choose, and what proper steps can be taken in order to use the data wisely to answer my research questions.

I take Willig's (2012) suggestion that I should be explicit about the knowledge expected to explore via different types of questions. I also accept Emerson and Frosh's (2004) warning, whatever method is adopted, data can never be able to speak for itself but is interpreted by researchers who should be very careful because the investments such as personal experiences and beliefs, emotional inputs and theoretical orientation are to a certain extent interpretative as well.

Drawing upon the literature, there are several commonly used approaches such as content analysis, thematic analysis, discourse analysis, interpretive analysis, constant comparative analysis (also generally referred as grounded theory approach or inductive analysis) (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Freeman, 2017; Lester, Cho & Lochmiller, 2020). Chenail (2012) adds that to effectively analyze qualitative data, it is critical to make wise decision of suitable methods such as descriptive or interpretive approach (Sandelowski, 1995; Thorne, 2008), and designer approaches including grounded theory, ethnography or phenomenology. I accept Flick's (2014) assertion that from a more practical perspective, the two principal ways to approach qualitative data are: 1) dividing big sets of the data into smaller ones to reduce the complexity; 2) providing interpretations of the information. The first one lay emphasis on the grouping of meanings via coding, which is commonly used in grounded theory analysis. The second strategy focuses on describing and explaining the meanings of the data, thus probably leading to a longer text interpreting the original scripts. These different qualitative data analysis methods share similarities and differences (Willig, 2012). Prior to deciding which method to adopt, I carefully made comparisons and considered which one could best serve the aims and goals of data analysis and different types of the data.

Qualitative content analysis aims at describing the meanings of the qualitative data in a systematic way (Schreier, 2012) and it sets up rules for the segmentation of data via systematic coding (Wutich & Bernard, 2016). Content analysis is considered the most prominent way of categorizing and grouping big sets of data (Schreier, 2012). The meanings of the content that are relevant to the research questions will be selected. Besides, content analysis requires a specific sequence of steps, which makes it

systematic. Lastly, the most important feature of content analysis is its high flexibility (Neuendorf, 2002; Krippendorff, 2004). This method shares many features with other qualitative data analysis methods for coding, categorizing and interpreting are the core of many qualitative data analysis approaches (Willig, 2012). However, I argue that the requirement of following specific steps is not suitable for this study because the analysis of interview data is an iterative process.

As to discourse analysis, the most popular types are probably discursive psychology (Edwards, 2004; Wiggins & Potter, 2008), foucauldian discourse analysis (Parker, 1992; Kendall & Wickham, 1999), and critical discourse analysis (Wodak & Meyer, 2001; Fairclough, 2010). Researchers using discourse analysis do not focus on interpretation but the hidden meanings of the language in particular social contexts are to be discovered. Language itself, and the nature and the capacities of language are the focuses rather than the participants' experiences. Language is not a medium, but a field to be studied in discourse analysis. Since what I am interested in is participants' experiences and attitudes towards the importance of teacher-student classroom communication instead of language itself, discourse analysis is definitely not a suitable data analysis approach to this study.

Narrative analysis is another frequently adopted analytical approach in qualitative research. In particular aspects, it is similar to discourse analysis method, both of which use theoretically derived conceptual tools (Willig, 2012). Narrative researchers also believe social realities are constructed. However, the data is collected differently, the type of data is different, and the goals and data analysis methods are different as well. Narrative researchers seek for and find stories in the data while I seek for themes and their connections with the existing theories. Therefore, this method does not fit with my research aims.

In addition to all the methods mentioned above, grounded theory is always mentioned as well although it is often regarded as a research approach (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2012) rather than a data analysis approach. In a grounded theory research, data derives from individual or collective actions in particular settings and the data is often analyzed via comparative methods. The analysis focuses on the actions and processes instead of themes. Theory construction is the goal of data analysis rather than description, interpretation or application of the existing theories. That data collection and analysis proceed simultaneously and new theories will develop and emerge are two

major features of grounded theory. Researchers such as ethnography and action research also tend to use comparative methods to analyze data for they are likely to bring change as a result, so comparative analysis fits well into the aims (Willig, 2012). Compared with this research, which aims at exploring the importance of teacher-student classroom communication via listening to participants' stories, the research directions are totally different. Therefore, this data analysis approach is inapplicable.

Thematic analysis is also widely used in different fields such as psychology, medicine, and education (Frith & Gleeson, 2004; Halverson, Graham, Spring, Drysdale & Henrie, 2014). It enjoys the feature of 'theoretical flexibility' (Clarke & Braun, 2013: 120), which means disciplinary theories can be engaged by researchers from different disciplines when conducting a thematic analysis. In addition, this data analysis method can be adopted to analyze various types of data and is effective when data sets need to be sorted through. Thematic analysis is a process of seeking for themes from the data and identifying themes. In the process, meanings that are related to the research questions are captured and links between the themes might be found as well (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I summarized five reasons to further explain my decision of adopting a thematic analysis approach to analyze my data: 1) the theoretical flexibility facilitates the generation of a more relevant analysis within the field and the answers to various research questions for this analytic method allows various disciplinary theories and perspectives to be engaged (Lester, Cho & Lochmiller, 2020); 2) thematic analysis fits well into sorting through the raw data to search for, identify and group patterns so as to extract themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994); 3) thematic analysis applies to different types of data and data sizes (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017); 4) it is a useful method to probe into different perspectives of different participants, and prompt unexpected insights (King, 2004); 5) since there is few complex procedures or requirement of profound theoretical knowledge of other qualitative methods, this approach is relatively easier and quick to learn but very useful to meet various needs of different types of studies (Braun & Clarke, 2006; King, 2004). These five aspects illustrate the general advantages of adopting a thematic analysis approach, which are applicable to my study because a flexible data analysis approach allows me to extract themes from a large amount of qualitative interview data and explore deeper into the participants' experiences. However, I have noticed the disadvantages of this data analysis approach. As an advantage, theoretical flexibility is often referred to.



Nevertheless, it might be a potential risk threatening the consistency and coherence of the research (Holloway & Todres, 2003). In addition, Braun and Clarke (2006) warn that ignoring language use is another weakness of thematic analysis. Unlike other analytic methods such as grounded theory and ethnography (both regarded as a methodology and a data analysis method (Clark & Braun, 2013: 120)), just as an analytic method, the literature on thematic analysis is limited, leading to less theoretical support to me (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017). Being aware of the disadvantages, I took them into account during the analysis process to minimize the potential risks. As indicated by Clarke and Braun (2013), thematic analysis approach is definitely not the only method approaching qualitative interview data, but is a useful starting point of conducting a rigorous qualitative data analysis.

Nevertheless, as I explored deeper into this analysis approach, problems emerged. This method was considered relatively poorly demarcated and understood, and it was initially published as a method employed in the field of psychology in 2006 which was the most frequently cited (Terry, Hayfield, Clarke & Braun, 2017; Braun & Clarke, 2019). However, the more recent work of Braun and Clarke (2019) with a more explicit articulation of this approach to reflexive thematic analysis is not fully referred to by researchers. Although I referred to Braun and Clarke (2006) and found that the approach was applicable and suitable to this research, there was aspect left incompletely defined which led to misconceptions. In order to thoroughly understand this approach, correctly employ this approach to analyze my data, and to avoid mixing other approaches to thematic analysis, I drew upon the current work of Braun and Clarke (2019). According to them, there are three principal approaches to thematic analysis which include coding reliability thematic analysis, codebook approaches to thematic analysis and the reflexive approach to thematic approach (Braun and Clarke, 2019). The reflexive thematic approach sits well with this research because it is a theoretically flexible interpretative approach that facilitates the identification and generation of themes in the data set and it lays emphasis on the researchers' roles in the knowledge production process. It is also an approach that embraces creativity, subjectivity, and reflexivity, in which they are not a threat but the nature of this method. It emphasizes that themes do not appear automatically, but are identified and created from the interpreted codes. Moreover, it allows the diversity of meanings in relation to the research topic. Researchers who adopt this method do not follow a highly structured

procedure but engage with the data reflectively and thoughtfully in the analytic process. The most important point is that in the recent work of Braun and Clarke (2019), this data analysis approach is defined as a purely qualitative method and should be enacted by researchers who hold qualitative paradigms such as constructivism. These claims are consistent with what I believe of qualitative data analysis. The work of 2019 demarcates and defines this data analysis approach more clearly, which gives me more confidence of employing this method to analyze my data because it supports what I believe and what I want to acquire from my data and it is the most suitable method to this particular study.

Lastly, when exploring different data analysis approaches, computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) such as NVivo and ATLAS is frequently mentioned and recommended by quite a number of researchers such as Tesch (1990), Gibbs (2007), Denscombe (2014), Flick (2014), Marshall and Rossman (2016), Maher, Hadfield, Hutchings and de Eyto (2018), Vignato, Inman, Patsais, and Conley (2021). These software programs are created to help researchers handle vast quantities of data and they are used especially when coding is a main analytic process, which takes considerable time (Gibbs, 2007). According to Bazeley and Jackson (2013), CAQDAS, as a data analysis method, is quite useful in organizing, storing, and searching for data. I experienced with Nvivo when completing the transcription and translation. On one hand, NVivo functions as a database, holding quantities of transcripts. On the other hand, notes can be taken, memos can be kept, and coding can be done in various ways via NVivo. The data is kept neat and clear, and I can always get easy access to whatever data I need. However, as Flick (2009) states, except for the function in the basic and simple processing of the data being proved helpful, other added value of NVivo was not evident in my trial. CAQDAS does offer support to qualitative research data analysis and helps in organizing and structuring the data via processing materials input. Furthermore, validity and reliability can be enhanced by using computer-aid methods for the better management of the data without the loss of contextual factors (Kelle & Laurie, 1995; Gibbs, 2007). However, it is humans who analyze the data (Kelle, 2004). Codes and categories are decided, generated, verified, and interpreted by researchers rather than the lifeless software programs (Kelle, 2004). My epistemological position leads me to believe that the data for this study derives from the interaction between the researcher and the participants via interviews. Knowledge is socially constructed by

human touch. Therefore, the interpretations of meanings should not rely on machines but humans instead. This is the nature of qualitative research, in which the involvement of humans at each stage should not be abandoned. CAQDAS can always be a help and support but not a substitute of researchers in qualitative data analysis since the advantages, limitations and potential risks co-exist (Garcia-Horta & Guerra-Ramos, 2009). I therefore decided not to use the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software to analyze my data.

Data analysis is the vital step in qualitative research since the analysis plays a decisive role in forming the ultimate results of the research whatever type the data is (Flick, 2014). For this particular study, as Denzin and Lincoln (2000), Sechelski and Onwuegbuzie (2019) state, the qualitative data analysis is the most difficult part of the research. On one hand, the qualitative data I gathered via interviews was complex, which made organizing piles of data difficult. On the other hand, searching for valid information and responses to my research questions was time- and energy-consuming. Whether the data could answer the research questions could be known only when it was analyzed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) although I had planned it to ensure that the data I collected would be sufficiently illuminative. Qualitative data analysis occurs at any moment in and after the data collection process, especially in transcription and translation, where data analysis is never absent (Ziebland & McPherson, 2006; Gibbs, 2007; Galletta, 2013;). It is integrated into different stages and it is a ‘back-and-forth’ process (Teddie & Tashakkori, 2009: 251). I kept returning to data frequently, which is essential (Galletta, 2013). Presenting the data analysis after the data collection does not indicate the time sequence. In fact, as discussed, the data analysis takes place throughout the research process.

Prior to the data analysis, it is significant to know exactly and clearly the goals of analyzing the data (Newby, 2010; Galletta, 2013). According to Flick (2014), there are three goals of qualitative data analysis which include describing the subjective experiences of the participants, identifying the conditions, and developing a theory. Anfara, Brown, and Mangione’s work (2002) provides a more specific interpretation that qualitative data analysis intends to bring meanings to the data set so that detailed descriptions can be provided to a problem or phenomenon, insights into professional practices can be offered, and solutions to particular issues can be found. From a different perspective, Chenail (2012) notes that qualitative data analysis aims at

transforming data into information and then transforming information into knowledge, but eventually the knowledge will be transformed into wisdom. In addition, Grbich (2007) summarizes the goal of qualitative data analysis by emphasizing its target as moving from description to interpretation of the data. Whilst these arguments are valid, I subscribe to the more focused illustration of the goal of qualitative data analysis stated by Merriam and Tisdell (2015)— making sense out of the data to answer the research questions is the ultimate goal of data analysis, which aligns with my belief. I therefore designed my own data analysis process with this goal in mind to fulfil this aim. I wish to understand the collected data, describe the data, interpret the meanings and report the findings. I contend that this is what data analysis mainly concerns in this qualitative research. These are all involved in one overall goal of qualitative data analysis— answering the research questions because research questions concern the field being studied and all the findings should be consistent with the research topic.

Like any qualitative data analysis, there is no right way or absolute criteria and standard for analyzing qualitative interview data (Roulston, 2010a). That is not to say the quality of qualitative data analysis cannot be assessed, but the criteria and the assessment of the quality of qualitative data analysis should be the robustness of the practices undertaken. Interview data derives from the interaction between the researcher and the participants (Roulston, 2006). Knowledge is socially constructed and the knowledge of the researched area is co-constructed during the interview process as well. Underpinned by this philosophical position, it is undoubted that the analysis and the results heavily depend on meanings and interpretations of meanings (Willig, 2012).

I accept Flick's (2014) argument that the tasks of qualitative data analysis include organizing and classifying the data so that patterns, categories and themes can be clearly noted, understanding data in order to well describe participants' meanings and attitudes, and using the theories to facilitates the understanding of the data and what it is showing. This process of analyzing the data should be careful and transparent so that rigor can be demonstrated (Gläser & Laudel, 2013). Newby (2010), Gibbs (2012), Marshall and Rossman (2016) summarize qualitative data analysis into five steps: 1) organizing, transcribing, synthesizing and summarizing the collected data; 2) analyzing the data including reading, reviewing, and categorizing the data, exploring and identifying meanings, describing and presenting the data, coding, and finding themes; 3) interpreting the data; 4) making conclusions and reporting findings; 5) discussing,

examining and ensuring validity and reliability. I contend that these five steps are rational, and therefore I referred to the steps when analyzing the data. These steps are not presented according to a time sequence. Analyzing qualitative interview data is a process in which data reduction, data organization and reorganization, and data representation are encompassed (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña (1994). Besides, Kvale (2007: 104) illustrates the process of analyzing interview data as including ‘meaning coding’, ‘meaning condensation’, and ‘meaning interpretation’. The details of a thematic analysis of the interview data for this study will be discussed in Chapter 4.

In summary, the nature of qualitative research indicates that qualitative data analysis is more about developing concepts, understanding and interpreting meanings and explaining what happens according to the collected data rather than assessing hypotheses or theories (Taylor & Gibbs, 2010). It is often an inductive process to reasoning and theorizing (OReilly & Bone, 2008), within which themes, concepts, categories and theories are formed. These forms of findings are inductively derived from the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). There is no specific rule or standard judging whether the method of conducting qualitative data analysis is correct or not (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Patton, 2002). The most suitable way must be the one which best serves the purpose of the research. As I have adopted a constructivist view of the emphasis on socially constructed multiple realities, meaning-making, and meaning interpretation, I argue that a thematic approach is suitable to analyze my qualitative data. As stated, during the inductive process, meanings are interpreted and themes are grouped. Chapter 4 will further discuss the detailed process of data analysis.

The next concern of the methodological decision is the logical and concise way in which the findings can be reported and I will discuss it in the next section.

### **3.6 Deciding on the Way of Presenting the Findings**

Drawing on Braun and Clarke (2006; 2019), the results of my thematic analysis should be presented in a logical and concise way so as to make the results accessible and understandable, and the claims yielded from the data credible. Unlike quantitative research findings usually presented in numeric forms, qualitative research findings rely heavily on descriptions of details and interpretations of meanings (File, Mueller, Wisneski & Stremmel, 2016). Similar to the data analysis process, writing-up the findings is also iterative (Galletta, 2013). Returning to the raw data, codes, categories

and themes often occurs so as to not only precisely and comprehensively display the results, but also connect the information.

Writing-up qualitative research findings is never an easy job (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1997) for various reasons and challenges. Firstly, linking and weaving all the information derived from the raw data into an understandable story is rather difficult (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Although the raw data has been coded and categorized, and themes have been decided, organizing them into a clear, readable and credible report is not easy. Secondly, like qualitative data collection and analysis, there is no particular criteria to judge the findings and no specific rules, formats or standards concerning how to report the findings (Lofland, 1974). In this case, flexibility is guaranteed and maximized. This may however allow the findings to be challenged. Thirdly, new ethical issues might arise when reporting the findings. For instance, I might frequently quote the participants' original words to fully support the claims or demonstrate meanings. Protecting the participants from being recognized is a newly emerging ethical concern.

Although the challenges of writing-up and reporting findings are various, there are suggested approaches and considerations of how to present the findings in a logical and credible way (Dahler-Larsen, 2008). Dahler-Larsen's (2008) work argues that the essence of reporting the findings is to display the analyzed and summarized data so that an overall story about what has happened can be presented and evidence can be given for how the conclusions are linked to the raw data. I take Dahler-Larsen's (2008) suggestion that authenticity, inclusiveness, and transparency as three rules of reporting qualitative findings. These three words, which I referred to as a guideline when I wrote up the findings are of great importance for three reasons. Firstly, maintaining authenticity of the data, and acting on behalf of participants' voices are always my key priority throughout the research process. Secondly, being inclusive indicates that the findings are able to represent all the data without missing any important points relevant to the research topic. Lastly, transparency is the premise of data collection, data analysis and reporting findings. It not only urges me to engage in a reflexive approach to my findings, but allows external scrutiny as well.

In addition to the recommended guidelines, there are different tools and approaches to use in reporting qualitative findings suggested by King (2004), Dahler-Larsen (2008), Brinkmann (2013), File, Mueller, Wisneski and Stremmel (2016), Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2017), Nowell, Norris, White and Moules (2017). I

accept Cohen, Manion and Morrison's (2017) recommendation that the findings can be divided into segments which are easy but useful to the clear and logical description of findings. The different segments are interconnected and eventually constitute the whole story, facilitating understanding of the findings.

As to this study, I decided to write up and report the findings mainly based on the research questions. I used the research questions as an organizing device to help me to organize and interpret what I had found. On one hand, the data was collected individually via one method—interview. As a result, presenting the findings by people, time sequence, or data-collection instrument are not suitable methods. On the other hand, the interview questions were designed according to the research questions, which means the participants were interviewed question by question. Moreover, in the data analysis process, to handle the large amount of raw data, I also segmented the data according to the research questions as recommended by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2017) to maintain coherence. Therefore, it is rational to be consistent when reporting the findings by segmenting them. This viewpoint supports my chosen method. The research questions have been put forward at the beginning of the research, and they are used as an organizing device to present the data at this stage, which seems to be a complete loop. As for each research question, I also presented the findings according to different groups of participants and themes, depending on different features of both the questions and answers to facilitate understanding of the findings.

In addition, since independent codes and themes do not tell the entire story and they do not indicate meanings when separated from the data (Lester, Cho & Lochmiller, 2020), excerpts and quotes were utilized to further interpret and explain meanings. This is supported by King (2004) who notes that it is necessary to directly quote participants' words in the report of findings because it adds to the in-depth understanding of important points condensed in the themes. Following Braun and Clarke (2006), I decided to use excerpts and quotes to increase the validity of the findings whilst tables and figures were always useful and key elements to support the clear summary and illustration of data presentation (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Hence, the tables and figures were also employed as an assistance to the presentation of the findings.

The last concern of this chapter is the ethical issues, which will be discussed in detail in the next section.

### **3.7 Ethical Concerns**

Ethical issues are complex especially in research involving people or interacting with people (Stutchbury & Fox, 2009). Cavan (1977: 810) defines ethics as ‘a matter of principled sensitivity to the rights of others’. I refer to Basit’s (2013: 506) persuasive argument that all researchers are required to do research ‘in an ethical manner’, and seeking for and disseminating knowledge should be a moral act. Stutchbury and Fox (2009) further illustrate that researchers must take the responsibility to protect participants’ privacy, benefit, and dignity. I accept Tangen’s (2014) argument, although there might be conflict between protecting participants’ benefits and ensuring the quality of research, ethical principles do not hinder or constrain the research process but facilitate research conducted in a more rigorous and ethical way. Merriam and Tisdell (2015), and Patton (2015:703) extend the argument by commenting that rigor of the research is ensured not by research design, research methods, data collection or analysis, but by the ‘rigorous thinking’ of researcher and ‘rigorous thinking’ also includes ethical concerns. There are a wide range of aspects and issues of ethics throughout the whole research process which must be carefully considered and examined such as consent form, confidentiality, anonymity, rights, permissions, protections, data storage, ownership and use of data, and access to data. As discussed, ethical issues might be more inclined to arise within research involving human interaction (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007), so this makes ethics a particular issue for my research.

I was guided by BERA (2018) ethical guidelines and by UH procedures. As requested, I followed the University of Hertfordshire application procedures and got the ethical approval and the protocol number, which means technically, the ethics of the research has been examined and ethical problems can be properly handled. However, ethical dilemmas and problems might emerge and cannot be expected at any stage, especially in the process of data collection and analysis. As argued by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2017), the principal ethical dilemma occurs when the pursuit of truths contradicts with participants’ benefits.

When conducting the pilot observations, I encountered and suffered from ethical dilemmas. I argue that any behavior that might threaten participants’ benefits is unethical and must be avoided. In addition, the experience also warned me of paying attention to the issues of confidentiality and anonymity. I accept Burgess’s (1989: 55)



argument that the relationship between the researcher and the researched indicates that the researcher must ensure the participants' rights and protect the participants from being 'harmed, deceived, betrayed or exploited'. Keeping all the participants anonymous is unquestionable and a must. When it does not have an impact on the results, changing the gender is also one of the methods I adopted. Hiding or purposefully mixing up the name of the university that the participants work for or study in is another feasible and effective measure. I avoided mentioning the name of the university I work within throughout the whole research process. Since people and interacting with people are often involved in social science, negative effects such as indignity are more inclined to be intangible (Stutchbury & Fox, 2009). During the data collection process, I agree that the consent form must be provided, anonymity and confidentiality must be ensured, participants' privacy must be guaranteed, the storage and usage of the data must be well informed, the data must be properly handled, recording and videoing must be informed in advance, contribution must be appreciated, and no damage or negative influences must be guaranteed (Bergmark, 2020).

Prior to collecting data, the first concern is the consent form, which informs the participants of the potential risks, benefits, and the right-protection strategies so that they can choose whether to take part in the study and whether they can quit at any time without any reason (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 1992; Howe & Moses, 1999). I referred to the ethics forms provided by University of Hertfordshire. These two forms were prepared in advance and were given to the participants prior to the interviews. The forms are presented in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2. Anonymity is another consideration for I believe that protecting participants' privacy is not only essential but it shows respect to them as well. Since there are three different groups, I decided to use C1-C4 indicating non-native English speaker language teacher participants, N1-N5 indicating native English speaker language teacher participants, and S1-S4 indicating student participants. They were consistently used throughout the research including data collection, data analysis and reporting findings. I also took colleague relationships and teacher-student relationship into account. The native English speaker teacher group is technically not my colleague because as mentioned, they are from the language training company, which makes the relationship relatively simple. This simplifies the relationship for two reasons. On one hand, since the university and the language training company are two separate organizations, there is not much interaction and not

much to be shared (including academic work), which makes the participants' privacy more easily protected. On the other hand, there is no interest/benefit-related consideration since we are from two different organizations. Hence, the potential participants might accept or refuse the interview according to their own interest and convenience without worrying about destroying colleague relationship. As to the non-native English speaker teacher participants, as Basit (2010) warns, they might feel inconvenienced, uninterested, or unwilling to be interviewed. However, due to the worry of damaging colleague relationship, they might accept the interview while they did not really tell the truths when being interviewed. I asked for the potential participants for permission via 'WeChat' first and then double-checked by asking them in person. Meanwhile, I explained and promised to them twice that rejection did not influence colleague relationship as sincerely as I could in order to reduce their worry. Thus, their acceptance of the interview was based on the personal will. Besides, although the student participants are all above 18, the teacher-student relationship is subtler because students might be worried about their scores if they reject the interview. I took Head's (2018; 2020) warning that power relations such as teacher-teacher and teacher-student relationships could never be neglected. The decision of selecting student participants from those who I teach is to avoid undue participant concerns. My decision can be supported by Byrne, Brughha and Clarke (2015) who argue if the researcher is familiar to the participants, the influences of power differentials can be reduced to the minimum. Since we knew each other for a period of time, there might be mutual understanding and trust so that when I explained and promised that rejection would not bring any impact on the scores, they would be more inclined to trust me. The next consideration is the storage and access to the data. Before collecting data, I have created coded file folders to ensure the raw data can only be accessed to myself. The data is only used in the thesis. Whether the thesis will be published cannot be known at this stage. Therefore, if the thesis is going to be published or work from it as a journal article, all the participants will be informed. Since the face-to-face interviews were conducted in the context of a world-wide pandemic (Covid-19) period (face-to-face social interactions were allowed in China's policy when I collected the data in the year 2020), I provided the participants with facial masks, and hand cleanser. In the interviews, a safe distance was kept.

Referring to the data analysis phase of the research, I took the following ethical considerations into account. Firstly, I contend that the participants' benefit outweighs anything and can never be sacrificed for any purpose. This is the ethical principle I insist when undertaking the research. In this study, there were altogether 13 participants interviewed, among which 6 interviews were conducted in English and 7 interviews were conducted in Chinese. These seven interviews not only were transcribed but translated as well. The translated scripts make it not so easy to be traced and recognized since the language habits of speaking in Chinese might be affected and hidden during the translation process. However, risk of being traced exists for those six transcribed scripts, especially the student participants. I avoided the information and particular features which could be easily traced when transcribing the data. When transcribing and translating the data, there were harsh comments and unhappy experiences of poor teacher-student classroom communication shared by both teacher and student participants. I used synonyms to express the similar meanings if the original words had the risk of being easily recognized and traced. Authenticity is of great importance, but Secondly, as Flick (2014) notes that ethical challenges exist as well when interpreting the data for the underlying meanings will be probed into instead of describing the surface meanings, thus raising the question of whether the meanings are appropriately interpreted and whose voice is presented. The potential risk is that the researcher has the power to embed his/her own thoughts in the interpretations or he/she might deliberately or not deliberately blend the assumption into the interpretations (Mertens, 2012). Keeping a reflexive journal, standing back and reviewing the interpretations are effective ways I employed to avoid this ethical problem.

In summary, ethical issues are of great importance and cannot be limited to one or two sections or times when the research is actually being undertaken, but are interwoven into every aspect and are likely to occur at any stage. As argued by Kimmel (1988), whatever ethical stance a researcher assumes, the unknown and unforeseen difficulties always exist. What can be done is to be more careful in ethical decision-making to minimize the negative impact so that more valid results will be generated. I respect the contribution of the participants and pay attention that the participants' benefits should never be threatened, and I also wish to pursue authenticity of the data. Keeping the balance is not easy but careful considerations always facilitate to eliminate problems or reduce risks to the minimum (Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault, 2015).

## **A Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter allows me to clarify the underpinning philosophical and pragmatic grounding, justify my methodology, chart the decision-making process, articulate why these decisions and choices are reasonable, clarify the rationale and rigor of research approaches to be employed, support deep thinking about the potential problems at different stages, and prepare fully for the next phase of the research process. Methodology has been articulated, the experience of pilot study has been summarized, the advantages and disadvantages of interview has been discussed, interview type and questions have been decided, suitable sampling strategy has been adopted, and ethical issues and dilemmas at different stages have been discussed with measures put forward. In the next chapter, I move on to discuss the research and the data analysis process.

## **Chapter 4 Data Collection and Analysis**

In this chapter, I move on to chart how the research process and the data analysis process were enacted in order to transparently present the details to increase the rigor and ethical sensitivity. I start with presenting five steps of how the data was collected. I will then take ensuring and increasing rigor into account. Following the data collection, how the data was analyzed through a thematic analysis approach will be presented. A thematic data analysis process is presented in detail. The chapter ends with a discussion of how rigor was ensured at this stage.

### **4.1 Data Collection**

In this section, five steps of how I collected the data will be presented: 1) recruiting participants; 2) preparation for interviews; 3) interviewing the participants; 4) the storage, use and access to data; 5) transcription and translation.

#### **4.1.1 Step1: Recruiting Participants**

The first step of the research process is the recruitment of participants before collecting data. In Chapter 3, I've clarified the sampling strategies with inclusion and exclusion criteria—whom to be interviewed, and how to select samples. This ensured a smooth recruitment process.

There are three groups of participants—native English speaker language teachers (foreign teachers), non-native English speaker language teachers (Chinese teachers), and students. As to the two groups of teacher participants, I checked out their teaching schedule first to ensure they had spare time and their spare time coincided with my interview schedule. The second round of sample selection was based on their teaching experiences, ages, genders and nationalities (native English speaker language teachers). I wish to hear from different voices. Therefore, these factors were taken into account when choosing participants. After two rounds of recruitment, a list of potential participants emerged. Since 'WeChat' was the most commonly used chatting App in China, I then sent instant messages via 'WeChat' to Chinese (non-native English speaker) teachers, asking if they were willing to be interviewed. All of the four Chinese (non-native English speaker) teachers agreed to be interviewed and suitable time was settled. Table 4.1 provides summary information on this group of participants.

<b>Non-native English Speaker Language Teacher Participants (C1-C4)</b>		
<b>Participant</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Teaching Experience</b>
C1	Male	4 years
C2	Female	2 years
C3	Male	7 years
C4	Male	7years

Table 4.1 *Information about Non-native English Speaker Language Teacher Participants*

For the native English speaker language teachers, I asked for their permission in person because technically they were not my colleagues but from a foreign language training company and I did not have their email addresses or other contact method. Asking them in person showed my sincerity and their responses were straightforward. When asking for their permission, one of the potential participants rejected because he had been assigned extra classes. As a result, he did not have enough spare time. I then asked the replacement potential participant and he was available and was pleased to be interviewed. And it was unexpected that one of the native English speaker language teachers who was interested in the topic volunteered as a participant. Therefore, there were five native English speaker language teacher participants instead of the planned four. Table 4.2 gives information on these participants.

<b>Native English Speaker Language Teacher Participants (N1-N5)</b>					
<b>Participant</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Nation</b>	<b>Teaching Experience in China</b>	<b>Fluency of Chinese</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
N1	Male	Canada	3 years	A little Cantonese	Canadian born Chinese
N2	Female	U.S.A.	4.5 years	A little Mandarin	
N3	Male	U.S.A.	3.5 years	None	
N4	Male	Australia	10 years	Fluent Chinese	Australian born Chinese
N5	Male	U.K.	10 years	None	

Table 4.2 *Information about Native English Speaker Language Teacher Participants*

According to the sampling decision discussed in Chapter 3, the student participants were selected at random to avoid biases in the sample (Brinkman, 2013). I taught three classes of different majors and the general class size was 35 students. I had informed all the students from these three classes of a brief introduction to the research, and asked for their permission to be involved in the random selection of participants. I provided them with three different ways (e-mail address, mobile phone number, and Wechat account) to contact me if they did not want to be selected as participants. After I got the permission, the class numbers and student numbers from 1 to 35 were put into two boxes. I picked up the class number first and then the student number. For example, if I randomly picked up ‘F21521’ and ‘23’, then the student was from Class F21521 and his/her student number was 23 so that the participant was clearly positioned. I again asked the selected student participants in person whether they were willing to join in the interview after class, and explained and promised sincerely that rejection was absolutely acceptable without any influence on them or their scores. All of the four student participants agreed to be interviewed. I checked with them if they were available and had spare time. On obtaining the positive answers, the recruitment of student participants was completed. As discussed in Chapter 3, I was even more careful when recruiting student participants because the existence of teacher-student power

differential might affect their choices. They might feel embarrassed to reject the teacher or they might be worried about any unexpected consequence of rejection. Hence, when I asked for their permission, I talked in a friendly, relaxing and sincere way and emphasized frequently on my identity as a researcher instead of a teacher to help them relax and make choices according to their own will. The information on student participants is shown in Table 4.3.

<b>Student (Non-English Majors) Participants (S1-S4)</b>					
<b>Participant</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>English Learning Experience</b>	<b>English Level</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
S1	Male	>18	>10 years	Level A Class	
S2	Female	>18	>10 years	Level A Class	
S3	Female	>18	13 years	Level A Class	
S4	Male	>18	13 years	Level A Class	

Table 4.3 *Information about Student Participants*

The recruitment of three groups of participants was successfully completed. Prior to preparing for the interviews, I made sure that I adhered to the ethical decisions I had taken as discussed in Chapter 3. Following this was the preparation for the data collection.

#### **4.1.2 Step 2: Getting Prepared for the Formal Data Collection**

Although the participants were recruited, interview questions had been decided and the ethical issues had been taken into account, there were still details to be considered before the formal data collection.

Location of the interview is of great importance (Mills, 2001) for a relaxing environment helps both the researcher and participants feel comfortable and less stressed. I had been to different corners of the university before deciding where to conduct the interviews. Neither the university cafe nor the office was feasible for it was either too noisy in the café or the noise would disturb other colleagues in the office. Besides, the office seemed too official and the atmosphere was not relaxing enough, leading to unavoidable tension of the participants. The teacher participants recommended the small meeting room. In one of the pilot studies, I used this small



meeting room when interviewing the student participant. However, from the body language, the student participant seemed to be uneasy and nervous and he later admitted that he felt stressed and nervous in the small meeting room because staying with a teacher alone in an unfamiliar place was awkward to him. Therefore, before the interviews, I asked for the student participants' preference of the interview site and they recommended the classroom because classroom was familiar to them. Hence, the interviews were conducted in the small meeting room for the teacher participants and the classroom for the student participants.

The next consideration concerns recording. Recording is not a compulsory requirement to researchers and it has both advantages and disadvantages (Atkins & Wallace, 2012). Participants might feel pressure when they know what they say are recorded. However, recording is helpful when analyzing data because information can be listened to repeatedly. As to the semi-structured interviews I conducted, I argue that recording is necessary. On one hand, according to the experience of the pilot interviews, rich data was generated, which made it impossible for me to take down notes without missing any information. On the other hand, being busy writing down information would hinder me from listening carefully to participants and effectively interacting with participants. In addition, I might not be able to keep sensitive or alert during interview process when noting down what the participants said, resulting in failing to make spontaneous feedback. Taking all these into account, I decided to record the interview process. Audio recording is commonly used in interviews (Delamont, 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). However, important factors such as body language cannot be recorded via audio recording, leading to its being considered as filtering data (Mishler, 1986). Although video recording can make up for this aspect, it might add to participants' pressure and distract them, which probably influences their responses (Atkins & Wallace, 2012). Although I considered the views of Mishler (1986) that data might be filtered without video recording, considering that the research focuses on the participants' sharing viewpoints, attitudes, ideas and experiences, and interpretations of the topic rather than other details such as body languages and facial expressions, I decided on audio recording because it was able to support me to review and analyze the data.

Since this research was conducted in two languages, the next dilemma was whether the participants were allowed to choose from their preferred language.

Language choice is a critical issue but is not always recognized or noticed (Cortazzi, Pilcher & Jin, 2011). For this study, the problem does not exist for the native English speaker language teacher group because they all speak English. By contrast, for the non-native English speaker language teacher group and the student group, whether language selection is allowed is rather difficult to decide for two reasons. On one hand, if all participants are required to use English, English level might hinder their expression of ideas especially for the student participants. As a result, the quality of the interview data might be affected (Cortazzi, Pilcher & Jin, 2011; Mann, 2016). On the other hand, if the participants choose to be interviewed in Chinese, in the following transcription and translation, the participants' meanings might be distorted. I made the decision to allow language selection because I wish to hear the truest voices and acquire rich data and ensure the quality of the data. I employed strategies to minimize the distortion problems, which will be discussed in the following section.

I printed the consent form EC3 and the participant information sheet EC6 (Appendix 1 and Appendix 2). In the pilot studies, when asking the non-native English speaker participants (the non-native English speaker language teachers and the students) to sign the consent form, they hesitated and expressed their concerns. By contrast, although the native English speaker language teacher participants asked about the purposes and results of signing a consent form, they did not worry as much as the Chinese did. In Chinese culture, signing scares people for Chinese are cautious. Oral permission is the preferred option. Hence, for the main study, I decided to acquire participants' oral permission via recording at the beginning of the interview to replace signing the consent form. It was implemented within all the participants in order to be fair and consistent within the research. The EC6 form was still provided to inform the participants about what the research was about, the purposes of the study, their privileges as participants, the advantages, benefits, risks and side effects of taking part in the project, how their rights were going to be protected, and how the data would be stored, used, and accessed. The EC6 form was provided in English since the non-native English speaker participants rejected a translated version. According to them, my oral explanation was adequate.

I had taken Patton's (1980) suggestion that academic terms and jargon should be avoided or it will make participants confused. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015), easily understood, straightforward and brief words are more helpful to the

understandings of the topic, interview questions, and exchange of ideas. Therefore, I checked the interview questions again to ensure difficult words were translated into easily-understood ones and to get familiar with the questions so that explanation could be offered immediately when problems and questions arose.

As discussed in Chapter 3, during the pandemic when face-to-face communication was not allowed in China, a pilot online interview had been tried. The student participants expressed their preference of being interviewed via the Internet. Online interview is not constrained by geography (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), and according to the student participants, people might feel more relaxed talking via chatting tools. Nevertheless, there are disadvantages of online interview such as the technical delay, and the Internet connecting problems (Brinkmann, 2013). Compared with on-line interviews, face-to-face interviews allow both the researcher and the participants not only to converse but also to interact vividly in person and build rapport (Brinkmann, 2013). Taking the strengths and weaknesses of online interviews and face-to-face interviews into account, I decided to respect the participants' choices. Therefore, before the data collection, I asked all the participants whether they would like to be interviewed online or face-to-face. It was unexpected that all the participants chose face-to-face interviews.

The last consideration is the time duration of the interview. I reviewed the interview questions and referred to the pilot interviews. Based on the experience of the pilot studies, the estimated time was about 30-60 minutes/person depending on length of participant responses.

With the preparations completed, the formal data collection started according to the schedule.

### **4.1.3 Step 3: Conducting the Interviews**

As advised by Patton (1980), I used an interview guide to facilitate the discussion for the main study, meaning that the research topics and questions are designed and specified in advance and during the interview process, the interviewer asks prepared questions in sequence. All the interviews were conducted individually because in-depth exploration of individuals' attitudes is the purpose of the study. Furthermore, since there are three different groups of participants, including teachers and students, group interview is not suitable for they might influence each other and especially the students

might not tell the truths facing a group of teachers. Following Kvale (1996), I decided that conducting individual interviews was appropriate to ensure the access of information.

Since there are altogether thirteen participants, one example will be cited to illustrate the interview process. I select one student participant as the example because among all the non-native English speaker participants, he is the only one who chose English as the interview language. The process I am describing is common for other participants, too. The process is described in detail as follows:

- I. **Location:** classroom
- II. **Participant:** S4; above 18 years old; English Level A Class; 13 years' English language learning experiences
- III. **Prepared Items:** printed interview question sheets; a laptop to store data; a notebook and a pen to take field notes; a mobile phone for audio recording (with telephone and text message functions mute to avoid interruptions and minimize distractions)
- IV. **Greeting:** Before starting the interview, casual chatting helps to make the participant relax and create a friendly atmosphere. Hence, it must be carefully planned (Mills, 2001). I agree with Kvale (1996) who claim that the researcher not only needs to be academically knowledgeable, but also excels at communication and interaction in order to make participants feel secure to talk freely. I asked S4 about his English language learning experiences, whether he had taken part in any research project before, and his favorite subject(s) in college.
- V. **Before the Interview (the interview guide):** I first asked for permission of audio recording and explained this was for the following data review and data analysis. The whole interview process would be recorded to avoid selective recording, which might cause biases. After S4 expressed understanding and allowed the recording, I asked him whether he had received the consent form (EC3) in advance. Since he was worried and felt insecure about signing the form, I asked if he allowed to give oral permission and have it recorded. Acquiring his permission, I then asked if there was any question about the participant information sheet (EC6). S4 said that he did not have problems understanding the content of the form. I explained again to ensure he was clear about his rights.

Then I briefly introduced the research and the interview. Making participants well informed helps participants know better about what is expected from him/her and reduce participants' feeling confused because of lack of knowledge (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2017). I informed S4 of how many questions would be asked, the estimated time duration, the anonymity strategy, and the use and access to the data. The detailed explanation and introduction of these aspects is so important that it facilitates to eliminate participants' doubt and helps participants know clearly about the entire procedure of the interview (Denscombe, 2014). After ensuring the understanding of details and having no question, I asked S4 to select his preferred language and treat me as a researcher instead of his teacher and promised him that I would take a scientific attitude and perspective towards the interview. He smiled and nodded, but admitted that it was difficult to regard me as a researcher. As a matter of fact, other student participants also expressed difficulty considering me as a researcher. Two of them said they felt '*funny*' and '*surprised*' at my serious and cautious attitude towards the interview because they considered it as a teacher's requirement. They would like to help although they had never experienced such a formal research project. This reflects the teacher-student relationship in the Chinese context. I have mentioned in Chapter 2 that in China, the hierarchical status decides teachers are superior to students, resulting in students' obedience. As a result, when they were asked to take part in this research project, they regarded it as a requirement instead of a request. Therefore, when I obeyed all the ethical rules, asked for their permission, showed sincerity, treated the interviews seriously and scientifically, and appreciated their permission, they felt '*flattered*'.

- VI. **Conducting the Interview:** I asked questions according to the prepared interview question list (presented in Chapter 3), which functioned as the outline. In addition to the question list, there were different unexpected questions emerging such as follow-up questions to ask for more details, yes or no questions to confirm attitudes, and questions to specify what happened, probe deeper into the topic, and check the understandings (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2017).

During the interview process, S4 answered the questions directly, but did not talk or extend his thoughts too much. I had mentioned that S4 did not talk a lot in the course I taught, and interviewing in English might also be a reason hindering more detailed responses. When this happened, I asked different types of questions to help S4 think from different perspectives and encourage S4 to talk. I paid great attention to being neutral and avoiding guiding S4. Personal biases and values must not be revealed to influence participants (Tuckman, 1972). In the interview process, different types of questions were helpful to acquire information (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). However, I was careful not to ask leading questions to avoid bias and influence S4's responses. Meanwhile, I also avoided yes-or-no questions since this type of questions could not help me to acquire detailed information and they were suitable in questionnaires to serve different purposes (Atkins & Wallace, 2012). After the interview, S4 admitted that *'it's more difficult to talk in English than I have thought and yes, English hinders my answers'*. Moreover, there were grammatical mistakes in S4's talking, among which some could be ignored without affecting the understanding of meanings while some might cause misunderstandings and ambiguity. In the circumstances, I checked the meanings with S4 in Chinese to ensure the accuracy of the understandings (Arksey & Knight, 1999). I left time for S4 when questions were asked so that he would have enough time to think about the question and clear his thoughts. When S4 was speaking, I did not interrupt, but nodded, and used words such as 'yes, all right, I understand, exactly' to show understanding, empathy and respect to his ideas and opinions. These verbal and non-verbal interactions helped to encourage S4 to express freely and frankly and make S4 feel that his voices were important and highly valued, and the interview was on an equal term. This approach was used with other participants as well. At the same time, it also helped to build a positive rapport between the participant and me so that mutual trust could be built (Cohen, Manion & Morrision, 2017). I asked S4 whether he understood the questions or had any comment. I did not judge S4's ideas or remarks but responded by making noises to show my interest in what he had said (Whyte, 1982). When S4 strayed from the topic or the target question, I would listen attentively but catch any opportunity to draw him back naturally and politely. It

was hard to balance between considering participants' feelings and seeking for valid data. However, the dynamics of the interview must be carefully maintained to keep the conversation going, achieve rich and authentic data, and motivate participants to share ideas, thoughts, feelings, attitudes and experiences (Kvale, 1996). In a word, during the entire interview process, I remained sensitive to the situations to make timely changes. I was also sensitive to S4's feelings, showed patience, interest, and friendliness, tolerated hesitations and silences, and comforted S4 when he had problems speaking in English (Denscombe, 2014). When I was fully engaged in the interview, I did not forget to take down field notes in order to note important points for the following data analysis. After all the interview questions had been covered, and S4 did not have anything to add, I ended the interview and appreciated S4's contribution. Then I exported the data and had it appropriately stored in a coded file. A follow-up reflection was immediately written so as to summarize experience to make improvements in the following interviews. This is supported by Merriam and Tisdell (2015) who point out the importance of follow-up reflections of interview by saying that reflections must be written down immediately after the interview so that insights, ideas, and important points can be noted down. It is not only an opportunity to summarize experience but the early start of information analysis.

- VII. **Reflections:** 1) 'Prompts and probes' mentioned by Morrison (1993: 66) are useful in semi-structured interviews. Prompts enabled me to clarify and repeat the interview questions (Denscombe, 2014). Probes can be effectively used when participants do not talk much or when the researcher wishes to explore deeper into participants' thoughts, attitudes and experiences. Repeating the questions, changing the speaking tone, asking for examples and showing interest in participants' responses all help researchers to probe (Priede, Jokinen, Ruuskanen, & Farrall, 2014). I used prompts and probes not only in interviewing S4, but all the other participants. They can be planned in advance, but adjustment and judgement must be made during the interview process according to different situations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The combination of these two tools facilitates the generation of rich and in-depth data from

participants, and they are also effective tools in asking for more details and clarification (Atkins & Wallace, 2012).

2) I know I had to be more careful when interviewing student participants because the teacher-student hierarchical status has been rooted in Chinese people. Being polite, patient and sincere, talking in a tender tone, properly using body languages and facial expressions, showing interest and understanding, and expressing gratitude are all helpful techniques. Although S4 was the last student participant interviewed, the summarized experience might be useful to other researches and in my own future researches.

This is one example cited from 13 interviews for the main study. The procedures and processes are similar to this one, but with changes and improvements based on the acquired experience and written reflections. There are two points worth noting. Firstly, there were two participants asking if the data generated was helpful and useful after the interviews. There were also participants asking about the progress of my research and offered encouragement when meeting in the school corridor. I considered this a positive result of the interviews for a good rapport had been built. Secondly, there was one participant who asked me to define ‘teacher-student’ communication to check if her understanding of the concept was consistent with mine. This reminded me of the significance of avoiding terms and jargon when raising questions in interviews and the importance of explaining terms and jargon when they could not be avoided. I took account of this when analyzing my data. In conclusion, as discussed in Chapter 3, my philosophical position enables me to honor difference and individuality. There were unexpected ideas from different angles which contributed to new knowledge of the researched area. In the next section, I move on to discuss transcription and translation of the raw data.

#### **4.1.4 Step 4: Transcription**

Although the interviews were time-consuming and energy-consuming, I enjoyed the whole process because listening to different voices was enlightening and there were always unexpected ideas emerging which broadened my view. By contrast, the following work was not only difficult but complex as well.



According to Kvale (1996), risk exists in the transcription process for data might be lost, distorted, or simplified. An interview is always regarded as a ‘social account’ (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2017: 523). To transcribe the social interaction into a written version cannot avoid data loss since these are two different forms. Speaking tones, facial expressions, body language, hesitations, and emotions are all inevitably difficult or even impossible to be transcribed. Audio recording has already lost non-verbal signals while during the transcription process, vocal signals are also possibly lost. In social conversations, words are vividly, dynamically, and interactively spoken with emotions, tones, intonations, pitches, and speed. By contrast, written words are relatively emotionless and rigid. It is probable that the same words indicate different meanings for oral and written versions are totally different. To make it more difficult, there is no rules or standards of whether, how, how much, and in what way to transcribe. I refer to Delamont’s (2012) argument that these choices are based on the purposes of transcribing the data. However, challenging the above argument, Mann (2016) claims that there are voices opposed to producing a transcript who believe it is not essential. Supported by Denzin and Lincoln (1994), I argue that transcription provides a chance to think, reflect on, and become familiar with the gathered data, and meanwhile it also gives me a chance to start to imagine the links and themes coming through the data. I therefore regard it as a useful and essential process.

I refer to Poland (2002) and Kitzinger’s (1998) warning that biases and errors might also arise because of selective data. Therefore, I take Merriam and Tisdell’s (2015) suggestion that the ideal way to deal with the recorded interviews is verbatim transcription since the data will be completely transcribed without any loss via this method. The disadvantages are that it not only takes a huge amount of time, but is a tedious and frustrating process as well. Partial transcription saves time and energy, but consistence of information cannot be ensured. As to my particular case, I was determined to transcribe all the 13 interviews. In addition to the benefits of verbatim transcription mentioned above, it is also helpful to data analysis. There are themes overlapping and themes appearing unexpectedly in the conversation, verbatim transcription makes it easier and more clear for me to find and review the themes. This happens as a result of the immersion in the data, which the process of transcription necessitates.

The next question following which is always controversial is that whether to do it myself or to have someone do the transcription (McCracken, 1988; Forsey, 2008; Tilley, 2003). There are two problems of having someone do the work. Firstly, a hired transcriber is not familiar with the topic and the terms since he/she hasn't been familiar with the research or engaged in the interview process. As a consequence, the quality of transcription cannot be guaranteed. Secondly, having someone transcribe the data might cause more data loss because of the unfamiliarity of the raw information. Analyzing data based on external transcription also reduces credibility. By contrast, as I conducted the interviews and took down field notes, I myself was familiar with them. When there is difficulty in transcribing, I can always review the audio recording materials, and even go back to the participants to check the correctness of the meanings. In addition, doing the transcription by myself helps me to get familiar with the data and notes can be taken down during the transcription process, which is helpful to the following data analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In order to save time, I tried voice recognition software for two pilot interviews. However, both of the English and Chinese interview scripts transcribed by the voice recognition software was full of errors because the different accents, dialects, unstandardized or vague pronunciation could not be recognized, thus easily leading to mistakes. To check the correctness and correct the errors even took more time. Hence, I decided not to use the voice recognition software. I was determined to do the transcription myself instead.

Another dilemma of transcribing is whether to transcribe the non-word signals such as 'um', 'ah', 'huh', sighs, smiles, laughs, and questioning or exclamation intonation. Although these vocal signals are not identified formal words, they represent and contain meanings in the interview discourse (Atkins & Wallace, 2012). They might convey the signals such as hesitating, questioning, arguing, agreeing or disagreeing. The information cannot be ignored since they are all expressive, and relevant to participants' attitudes, thoughts and responses to the questions. Ignorance of these signals means losing the originality of the live interview data and the scripts are selective (Powney & Watts, 1987). Hence, I decided not to neglect them but to transcribe them.

As to the vague words which could not be clearly identified, I turned to the participants for help and ensured the accuracy of the transcribed words. This happened in both English and Chinese interviews. As I am not a native English speaker, failure

in understanding what the native English speaker language teacher participants have said is inevitable. Going back to the participants for help is always an effective method. There was possibility that even the participants were not able to recognize what they had said after the interviews or I was not able to get access to the participants due to different reasons. In this circumstance, I decided to note it down in the script. Besides, if grammatical mistakes were made, my choice was not to correct the mistakes but to transcribe them truthfully and factually. Presenting the truest raw data is what I believe to be the most faithful to the data and is the most rigorous approach.

The last aspect to be settled is how to label the speakers in the transcription. I used ‘R’ to indicate the researcher, and ‘P’ to indicate the participant.

To summarize, transcription is the basis of data analysis. As discussed, any neglect, mistakes or carelessness might lead to distortion of meanings and biases, which will influence the findings (Delamont, 2012). After finalizing the transcription, the issue of translation needs to be addressed.

#### **4.1.5 Step 5: Translation**

As mentioned, this research was conducted in two languages and two cultures. As a result, there were some interviews conducted in Chinese and some in English. Table 4.4 presents a conclusion of the participants’ choices of interview languages, the transcription, and the translation work I did.

<b>Language Choices in Interviews/Transcription/Translation</b>				
<b>Group</b>	<b>Participant</b>	<b>Interview Language</b>	<b>Transcription</b>	<b>Translation</b>
Native English Speaker Teacher	N1	English	Yes	No
	N2	English	Yes	No
	N3	English	Yes	No
	N4	English	Yes	No
	N5	English	Yes	No
Non-native English Speaker Teacher	C1	Chinese	Yes	Yes
	C2	Chinese	Yes	Yes
	C3	Chinese	Yes	Yes
	C4	Chinese	Yes	Yes
Student	S1	Chinese	Yes	Yes
	S2	Chinese	Yes	Yes
	S3	Chinese	Yes	Yes
	S4	English	Yes	No

Table 4.4 *Language Choices in Interviews/Transcription/Translation*

The data was correspondingly transcribed according to the languages used in the respective interviews. There are two languages involved in the transcribed scripts. The interviews conducted in English were transcribed in English and the interviews conducted in Chinese were transcribed in Chinese. However, the thesis is written in English, which means the themes and the quotes must be translated into English when needed in reporting the findings. The dilemma is whether to translate all the scripts into English.

I analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of translating and not translating the scripts and eventually decided to translate all the Chinese scripts into English.

Basically, there are two points to take into account—whether to translate or not; whether to translate all the scripts or only a proportion of them. Since the thesis is written in English, the following data analysis concerning themes, and the quotes and excerpts cited in reporting the findings will definitely use English language. Hence, I contend that translation of the transcribed scripts is indispensable. However, to decide

what proportion to translate is harder. Translating all the scripts can definitely help to maintain the consistency because the systematic translation avoids differences in translating the same words, phrases, or sentences. If the themes, quotes and information are translated only when needed, they might be translated differently, and checking the consistency of the translation and making adjustment not only bring about inconvenience, but also waste a large amount of time. Translating all the scripts systematically and attentively, and checking the translated scripts help to reduce translation problems such as inconsistency and errors. This is the approach I adopted. When doing the translation within a period of time, I got familiar with the data. Intensive translation helped me to memorize the similar points and translated them consistently. However, the disadvantages include: 1) it is rather time- and energy-consuming; 2) doing the work intensively within a period of time is frustrating, tedious and tiresome. But when I analyzed the data, the convenience of reviewing the completed transcribed and translated scripts was tremendous.

As a matter of fact, the real challenge not only lies in the language itself, but also in the wider contextual issues as well. The complexity of the research is that the thesis is written in English while the topic concerns teacher-student communication in a Chinese classroom with a Chinese context, and the data was collected in a private university in China. As a result, the language problem exists throughout the whole research process and I have to switch between two languages constantly, but it is especially obvious in the translation of scripts for the accuracy and authenticity are strictly required, or distortion of meanings might happen leading to distorted findings.

The most difficult point of the translation work is related to the habit of using the language. Since English and Chinese belong to two different language families, they have different grammatical rules. Moreover, different cultures lead to different thinking patterns, which also brings about different habits of using the languages. Additionally, the usage of slang, idioms and colloquialism even adds to the difficulty in translation. As a non-native English speaker researcher, this indicates that there are possibilities that words, phrases and sentences can be translated into English but the authenticity and essences are lost. It occurred many times that finding a corresponding and suitable word or expression to fit into the English version was extremely hard. Although the meanings were similar after translation, to be exactly the same was almost impossible. The difficulty of doing the research in two languages decides that the problem cannot

be totally avoided. However, the influences should be reduced to the minimum. This will be further reflected in Chapter 7. Nevertheless, there is also a positive that the deep thinking required to find the best words in this situation helps me to connect more with the participants' views and also the underlying potential meanings.

In the next section, I will discuss the issues of what strategies I adopted to ensure the data was collected rigorously.

#### **4.1.6 Collecting the Data in a Rigorous Way**

Collecting the data in a rigorous way is an important issue especially for qualitative research. Different from quantitative research whose data is relatively more objective such as numbers, the data in qualitative research is relatively more subjective such as descriptions. Hence, to ensure rigor is rather difficult when doing qualitative research. I contend that ensuring rigor should be taken into account throughout the whole research process. In Chapter 3, when justifying methodology, the method of acquiring knowledge and finding out the truths should be appropriately chosen so that the expected data can be acquired. At this data collection phase, I argue that the emphasis transfers to the data collection instrument and the techniques of gathering the data. In my case, it concerns why and how valid data can be acquired via interview and what interview techniques are necessary to guarantee that the data and information gathered can be trustworthy. In addition, the transcribed and translated data is also the concern. In the data analysis process, being rigorous refers to the rationale of adopting a thematic analysis method and the way meanings are interpreted.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the researcher is the instrument of interviews. Therefore, I accept Shadish, Cook and Campbell's (2002) statement that instruments for collecting data should be safe and sound. As the 'instrument', I referred to five principles in qualitative research put forward by Lincoln and Guba (1985), Bogdan and Biklen (1992), and Ary and Razavieh (2002) to support me to collect valid and credible data. These principles include: 1) the setting must be natural; 2) the data are socially constructed; 3) the data is collected from the participants' voices; 4) the data is descriptive and rich; 5) the data should be presented on behalf of the participants instead of the researchers. I took account of these principles and examined before and after the data collection process. I subscribe to Maxwell (1992) and Mishler's (1986) view that in qualitative research, the word understanding is the most suitable expression. Since

researchers are living in the researched world, being exclusively objective is impossible. Therefore, other people's viewpoints are as valid as those of the researchers. Understanding participants' perspectives, making their voices heard, and precisely and accurately presenting the data according to their own viewpoints are what I wish to seek in this research.

I paid appropriate attention to the process of acquiring the information so that the following data analysis and presentation of results can be valid as well. For this study, what should be noted is to tailor data collection instrument, make full preparations before interviewing participants, and carefully employ interview techniques to make sure valid data is collected. During the data collection process, I took the following aspects into account to increase rigor.

Firstly, as discussed in Chapter 3, the selection of participants was strictly based on the decided sampling strategy—a random selection strategy. The rapport with the participants especially the student participants was carefully built and maintained. I agree with Simons (1982), McCormick and James (1988), and Greig and Taylor (1999) that trust should be built, students can be helped to overcome shyness, a less threatening environment can be provided, and the teacher-researcher should avoid being rigid and severe like the authority. I was aware of the impact of both teacher-student and researcher-participant relationship on gathering credible data and as suggested. I adopted strategies such as greeting, casual chatting, showing respect and sincerity, and talking in a friendly way to build and maintain a positive relationship.

Secondly, according to Cannell and Kahan (1968), the fundamental risks and threats in interviews are generally in regard to the interview questions—whether they are reasonably and logically designed to acquire the targeted and authentic information from the participants. To extend this viewpoint, Lansing, Ginsburg and Braaten (1961: 121) point out that bias, defined as a probably repeated or insisted tendency to make mistakes in similar aspects leading to overstating or understating 'true value' can easily arise in interviews. It is caused by people's partial understandings or attitudes towards issues or phenomenon. Referring to my interview questions, bias can hide there as well so that questions will be designed biasedly. Bias comes from different sources such as the personalities of both the researcher and the participants, the researcher's perspectives, thoughts, and attitudes towards the research topic, the researcher's attitudes, impression and relationship with the participants, and the researcher's tacit

knowledge of the researched field (Maxwell, 2005). Lee, (1993) and Scheurich, (1995) further illustrate that personal backgrounds such as social status, beliefs, gender, age, religion, and ethnicity might also cause bias. Bias will definitely and inevitably have an effect on the interviews and the participants in the process of interaction, thus affecting the data. It is almost impossible to totally avoid bias (Denscombe, 1995). As discussed, I took all the viewpoints into account and remained careful, sensitive and neutral to minimize bias. I prepared the interview schedule so that I asked different participants the same interview questions in the same sequence, but the interview questions were not highly structured as Silverman (1993) suggests encouraging the interaction between my participants and me as Scheurich (1995) points out. I made sure that the participants understood the interview questions in the same way. Additionally, the reflexive journal also enabled me to make reflections frequently so that I could examine what I did and make improvements to reduce my personal bias.

Thirdly, biased prompts and probes has always been the concern because during the process of prompts and probes, the occurrence of leading questions will greatly affect the results. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2017), leading questions indicate that researchers make assumptions about the responses and make the assumed answers implied to the participants. As a result, participants are guided by the leading questions instead of thinking of the questions and responding to the questions on behalf of their own attitudes or opinions. I kept cautious to remain sensitive not to ask leading questions or sharing guided opinions during the interview process. In addition, in order to avoid bias, as mentioned, the sequence of interview questions had never been changed, the entire interview process was recorded instead of selective recording, and the verbatim transcription and translation was conducted.

To summarize, as illustrated by Kvale (1996), there are seven things a researcher can do to become a skilled interviewer so as to acquire more authentic data, which has proved to be effective and helpful. I referred to these seven suggestions to collect my data in a rigorous way. Firstly, I got familiar with the subject and the topic before having the conversations with the participants. Secondly, as to semi-structured interviews, I made sure that they had been well-structured. Thirdly, the terms and jargon were either avoided or explained clearly and made easily understood to the participants to ensure the understanding of the meanings. Fourthly, I left enough time for the participants to think and answer in their own way. Fifthly, I kept empathic and sensitive to the



situations, which helped me to make timely adjustment. Sixthly, I stuck to the topic and drew the participants back when they were off the point. Lastly, I did not hesitate to go back to the participants to double-check the meanings of the information. All these respects were examined during the whole interview process including the preparation, ongoing, transcription and translation stage. When conducting the interviews, I endeavored to keep neutral and be aware of my personal perspectives, attitudes, and opinions and their potential influences on me, as part of my overall reflexive approach.

## **4.2 Analyzing the Data by Adopting a Thematic Analysis Approach**

Following the discussion of the data collection process, I move on to present how the data was analyzed via a thematic analysis method in detail. Three aspects will be covered in this section: 1) the preparation I made for the data analysis; 2) a thematic analysis process; 3) what I did to ensure rigor.

### **4.2.1 Preparing for Data Analysis**

As suggested by Galletta (2013, Merriam and Tisdell (2015), Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2017), prior to the thematic analysis, I made substantial and further preparations. I gathered all the materials needed in data analysis including raw data, field notes, and relevant materials, and thereafter I filed them into a location accessible but safe to protect participants' privacy. I also created a data catalog to allow easy position of the materials needed.

Firstly, separate word files were created with the same formats such as the layout, font, font size, and labels so as to make the information be more easily and conveniently accessed. I refer to Galletta's (2013) suggestion that not using participants' names to label files and documents should be taken into account. Therefore, I labelled the names of the files according to their sub-groups as N1-N5, C1-C4, and S1-S4. All of the thirteen word files, field notes, and related materials were stored in a coded document on the desktop of the computer. Since all of them would be frequently used in data analysis and the write-up of the findings, desktop might be the best location that would help me quickly find the documents (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Besides the desktop, I stored all the materials in two portable hard disks and one flash disk as a backup in case the computer crashes causing data loss.

After the completion of the organization of the data in the electronic device, I printed the transcribed and translated scripts. On one hand, making notes and highlighting important points on the printed materials was very convenient. On the other hand, storing the data in different places via different methods ensured the safety of the data. The hardcopy of the data was safely locked in a drawer.

Lastly, excel working sheets were created before starting analyzing the data as Figure 4.1 illustrates. The first sheet concerned the participants' information, which was grouped into three tables. The interview data was divided into data sets according to different research questions. Based on the research questions, the corresponding working sheets were named as 'importance', 'differences', 'communication failure', and 'influence', and were highlighted in different colors, which made it more accessible and clear (see the bottom of Figure 4.4).

Native English Speaker Language Teacher Participants (N1-N5)						
Participant	Gender	Nation	Teaching Experience	Fluency of Chinese	Remarks	
N1	Male	Canada	3 years	A little Cantonese	Canadian born Chinese	
N2	Female	U.S.A.	4.5 years	A little Mandarin		
N3	Male	U.S.A.	3.5 years	None		
N4	Male	Australia	10 years	Fluent Chinese	Australian born Chinese	
N5	Male	U.K.	10 years	None		
Non-native English Speaker Language Teacher Participants (C1-C5)						
Participant	Gender	Teaching Experience	Remarks			
C1	Male	4 years				
C2	Female	2 years				
C3	Male	7 years				
C4	Male	7years				
Student (Non-English Majors) Participants (S1-S4)						
Participant	Gender	Age	English Learning Experience	English Level	Remarks	
S1	Male	>18	>10 years	Level A Class		
S2	Female	>18	>10 years	Level A Class		
S3	Female	>18	13 years	Level A Class		
S4	Male	>18	13 years	Level A Class		

Figure 4.1 An Extract of Excel Working Sheet of Data Sets

With all the materials, equipment and stationery ready, I then set aside ample time for the data analysis.

#### **4.2.2 A Thematic Analysis Process**

At the beginning of this chapter, I have clarified that thematic analysis is not a linear process, but more likely an iterative one, in which I might go back and forth. It is even more difficult to state when exactly data analysis starts because it might already occur when collecting the data. As a result, fixed steps of the analytic process are usually not emphasized (Lester, Cho & Lochmiller, 2020). However, researchers such as Lincoln and Guba (1985), Creswell (2009), and Lochmiller and Lester (2017) still put forward fundamental steps indicating basic process of thematic analysis as shown in Figure 4.2. I referred to these suggested steps when conducting a thematic analysis. Generally, data analysis starts from the organization of materials such as transcription although I might start earlier from the data collection process. When I completed the transcription and translation, I got all the relevant materials prepared. Then it came to the familiarization phase. Via reading through the transcription, I became familiar with the data. Coding was the next step conducted by myself rather than assisted by computers. When coding was completed, I reviewed the codes. Then themes were generated and the meanings of themes were interpreted. Following that, I reported the findings in Chapter 5.

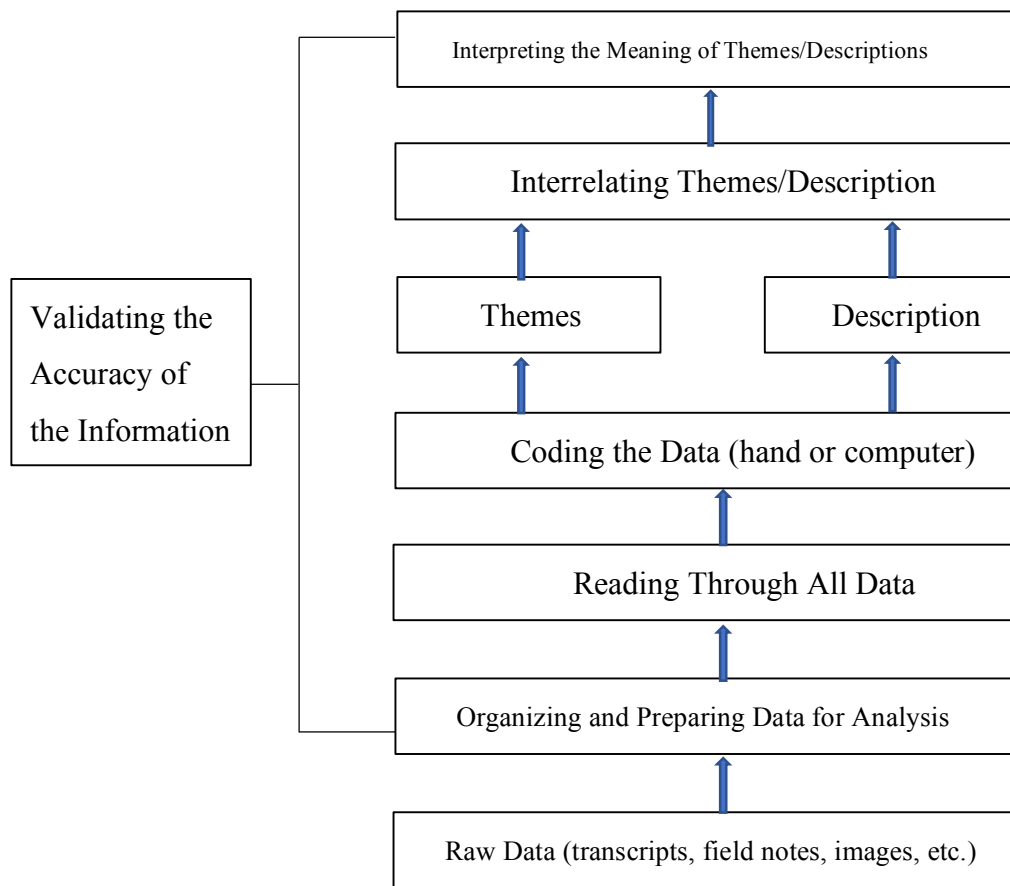


Figure 4.2 *Steps of Thematic Analysis (Creswell 2009: 185)*

The steps vary a bit for the preparation work such as transcription, and writing up the results might be included and excluded by different researchers. As to this study, as mentioned, I completed the transcription and translation as soon as the data had been collected. Hence, I placed this step in the preparation phase prior to getting familiar with the data. This section is for the detailed discussion of thematic analysis based on the recommended and commonly-acknowledged steps. To display a transparent process of analyzing the interview data, each step will be discussed separately.

#### *Familiarization of the Data*

Getting familiar with the data is an essential and indispensable step of qualitative data analysis. It can be regarded as the initial analysis (Lester, Cho & Lochmiller, 2020).

The transcription and translation process provided me with a great opportunity to become familiar with the data. When doing the transcription, I went back and forth to identify the words by listening repeatedly to what the participants said. Although it was not necessary to go back and forth as frequently as in transcription, I still needed

to revisit words, phrases and sentences in order to thoroughly understand the meanings and ensure the accuracy of translation. However, when doing the transcription and translation, the focus was on the language rather than the understanding of the content of the conversations. Therefore, I read through each interview script without adequate reflections. I approached the first time of reading-through as reading a story. After finishing the first reading, a second round of data familiarization started. Unlike the first round, I paid attention to details in this second round. I took down notes, wrote memos, highlighted important points, and recorded thoughts and ideas in the reflexive journal. All these were helpful, especially the notes, memos and reflections because they were regarded as holding a conversation between the data and me (Clarke, 2005). Via the second round of detail-seeking and note-taking method, the analytic importance was noted, unexpected thoughts and understandings of the data were captured, and the reflections functioned as a warning of potential biases.

After reading through the data twice, I got familiar with different stories told by the participants. Two rounds of reading did not indicate there was no need to do the reading again. On the contrary, more careful reading would take place in the coding process.

### *Coding*

Coding has always been regarded as the basic and fundamental activity in qualitative data analysis (Ryan & Bernard, 2000; Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Coding's ability to allow the contextualization of raw data allows me to assemble similar information by examining, comparing and conceptualizing the raw data (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2017). It is particularly important in qualitative data analysis for coding is a step which urges me to find out what is analytically interesting in the data relevant to the research, identify important points, and transfer the unstructured and unorganized data into logical groups by using short, clear and descriptive words or phrases (Morse & Richards, 2002; King, 2004). Codes function as the index of a book, which inform both the readers and myself of a brief introduction to the content of the book by providing the entries. The similar codes are to be categorized into themes (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2017).

Drawing upon the literature, there are different methods of coding such as the traditional way by using pens and memos, and coding assisted by computer programs

such as NVivo and ATLAS, Word and Excel. As to this study, I chose a combination of the traditional method and the help of Word and Excel since efficiency can be increased and time can be saved when properly taking advantage of the strengths of different methods. As I read through the data, I highlighted the participants' responses to each research question and recorded them in an Excel working sheet. I then examined and decided their analytic value so as to find out important points relevant to the research.

In addition to the coding methods, Saldana's (2016) statement that there are different phases or layers of coding supports how I coded my data. At the first layer of coding, I aimed at finding out what happened, searching for analytically interesting statements, and identifying what statements were relevant to the research topic from the raw data. Meanwhile, at this phase, the size and complexity of the data set was reduced. I did not change, modify or summarize the selected important statements but allowed them to stay naturally descriptive for this was the earliest stage of coding requiring the simplest tasks as a preparation phase. In this study, this was labelled as the pre-coding stage. At the next phase which required inference, I revisited the selected important statements, summarized and organized the statements into proper codes, and noted the connection between the selected relevant information and the research interest. At the final phase of coding, as Lester, Cho and Lochmiller (2020) suggest, I connected the codes and theoretical concepts.

As Figure 4.1 presents, the data set was divided according to research questions and put into different Excel working sheets. In the same working sheet, three tables of three different groups of participants were created. Table 4.5 is cited as an example of the first research question concerning the importance of teacher-student classroom communication. The word 'pre-coding' in the bracket indicates the first phase of coding discussed in the above section. As discussed, at the first phase, I read through the data quickly, looked for relevant information, and placed the relevant information in the Excel working sheet. They were either excerpts or codes. I then did the coding. The top of Table 4.5 provides the summary of the first research question and the group of the participants. The column 'quotes' are excerpts quoted from the data and the codes emerging from the data related to this research concern. When there were grammatical mistakes affecting the understanding or when the statements were too long, I summarized the statements by picking up words or phrases said by the participants

based on their original meanings rather than quoted them directly. And ‘remarks’ was put into the last column to record particular notes such as the explanation of the meanings of the abbreviations or the particular situations and points. I highlighted the important instances on the hardcopy of the scripts, and put the organized excerpts and statements in the corresponding working sheets. For each research question, there are three tables of native English speaker language teacher participants, non-native English speaker language teacher participants, and student participants. Table 4.5 gives an example of the formats.

<b>Native English Speaker Language Teacher Participants</b>	
<b>Quotes</b>	1. 'It's part of the key for any sort of interaction.'
	2. 'Language is to communicate, to strengthen.'
	3. 'Make sure that the class's following.'
	4. 'Check up the students.'
	5. 'I'm not a mind-reader.'
	6. 'Build a rapport with the students.'
	7. (Communication makes students) 'feel comfortable' (so that they are) 'more willing to ask questions, which can help to learn more things.'
	8. 'I want to make sure they can motivate in classroom.'
	9. A good communication leads to fewer complaints from the students.
	10. More communication helps the teachers know if the students need help.
<b>Remarks</b>	1. The rating depends on the participants' first reaction/answer to the question-what is the importance of teacher-student classroom communication.
	2. When asked the importance of teacher-student classroom communication, one participant said, 'it depends'. This fills into the column 'Others'.
	3. N2 changed 'important' to 'very important'; N3 changed 'important' to 'quite important'; N4 thought teacher and students 'shall have a good communication'.

Table 4.5 *Pre-coding of the Importance of T-S (Teacher-student) Classroom Communication*



As suggested by Creswell (2009), in an iterative process, I read and re-read the transcription to thoroughly understand the meanings and the key issues. I returned to the raw data frequently to reduce the risk of missing any important points. When there were overlapping statements provided by different participants, I noted it down, sorted through the excerpts and combined them into one statement.

I started to code after the completion of pre-coding. As discussed, at the coding phase, the excerpts and statements were summarized into short, descriptive and conclusive words. Meanwhile, the connection of the codes and the theoretical concepts were examined. Following Savage (2000), when coding, I frequently reflected, thought about and had a conversation with the gathered data. Codes are of significant importance for they are the basis of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Galletta (2013: 122) defines codes as ideas that can 'represent a core level of meaning' and coding involves searching for, locating and naming thematic patterns which can reflect the ideas. Therefore, drawing upon Creswell's (2013) suggestion, I categorized the codes to facilitate the generation of themes. I took what had been recommended by Galletta (2013) that codes should be documented. There are different ways of recording codes such as a software program, memos, yellow sticky notes and notebooks. I employed all the methods suggested because the analytical process was rather complex. Different methods of coding helped me to think from different angles, code more cautiously and leave tracks which could be traced back.

In pre-coding, I had found Excel working sheet helpful, convenient and effective. Moreover, tables could be designed neat and well-organized. Hence, I created similar tables when doing the coding. To start with, I read through the excerpts and statements, thought deeply about the surface and hidden meanings, and selected suitable and descriptive words and phrases which could accurately represent the participants' ideas, thoughts and meanings. I paid attention that the same words or phrases were used to indicate the same or very close meanings to maintain consistency and reduce repetition and complexity. Table 4.6 was cited as an example to illustrate how the analysis moved from pre-coding to coding. Similar to the pre-coding process, I frequently went back and forth and paused so that I was allowed adequate time to return to the data, think and rethink, probe deeper into the exact meanings, and review the decided codes. The codes came from both what I had read and what I noticed from the data itself. The complexity of the coding process came from varieties of angles. For instance, there were hidden and seemingly vague meanings which were important to be developed into codes rather difficult to locate. By contrast, there were also codes frequently emerging, showing significance to research focus, but eventually proved to be distractions. Moreover, there were

overlapping excerpts and statements as well leading to similar codes. To narrow down and develop a smaller but stronger related codes was challenging. As a basic but important step, coding was like a conversation between the data and myself. Through the continuous dialogue with the data, I could gradually figure out what the data wanted to tell me.

<b>Importance of Teacher-student Classroom Communication (coding)</b>	
<b>Native English Speaker Language Teacher Participants</b>	
Codes	1. Key of social interaction
	2. Communication as the core of language learning
	3. Checking up teaching and learning
	4. Checking up learning
	5. A way of knowing students' thoughts
	6. Building teacher-student rapport
	7. Creating a comfortable learning atmosphere
	8. Motivating students
	9. Avoiding complaints from the students
	10. A way of knowing students' problems/difficulties/demands

Table 4.6 *Coding-the Importance of T-S Classroom Communication (Native English Speaker Language Teacher Participants' Perspectives)*

As discussed at the beginning of this section, the last phase of coding was to take theoretical ideas into consideration and I thought about the connections between the conceptual and theoretical ideas and the codes. This was also the preparation for moving on towards the theme generation stage.

### *Theme Generation*

Theme generation is the following step because codes function as a pioneer and these initial and potentially relevant codes might later form themes or subthemes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This is a process involving the shaping of codes, the development of categories, and the generation of themes (Galletta, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). As Patton (1980) points out, codes, categories, and themes all derive from the raw data. After completing sorting through and segmenting the data, and locating the relevant points, I encapsulated the relationships via comparing similarities and contrasting differences of individual codes. Codes representing the same or similar meanings were classified into one category. This was an intermediate step preparing and promoting the generation of themes. As Aronson (1994) notes, when I was identifying themes, fragments of ideas and meanings were brought together. I accept Lester, Cho and Lochmiller's (2020) suggestion that themes should be inclusive and descriptive, incorporate all related categories, align with the conceptual goals of the research, and respond to research questions. Different from a code or a category, a theme precisely captures theoretical patterns directly responsive to research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) and generally embraces a broader scope (Ayres, 2008). Themes are regarded as important concepts interconnecting and interweaving the data, the research focus and the theoretical concepts (DeSantis & Ugarriza, 2000). Themes also synthesize the ideas and meanings deriving from the data.

Like any other steps of qualitative data analysis, there are various ways to make judgement and decide themes. Being consistent throughout the data analysis process is of huge significance (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I take King's (2004) advice that the predefined codes is the best place to search for themes. However, he also warns that researchers should be very careful not to rely heavily on the predefined codes to avoid taking any meanings for granted and identify themes which accord with the researchers' beliefs or assumptions. Meanwhile, referring to too few codes is not helpful as well because it is meaningless to leave the cautiously determined codes aside and waste time starting from the beginning again. In a word, being rigorous and analyzing data in a proper and suitable way are key to effective research. I drew upon the suggestions from the literature for the theme generation process.

The process of the generation of themes was even more difficult because as I explored from handling the raw data to coding to the thematic clusters, I thought more deeply about their connections and relationships with the theories and the research itself. Moreover, theme generation is an abstract phase, in which only a few words or phrases are used to represent and interpret the data in relation to theory. I used Figure 4.3 and Table 4.7 to show the theme generation process. Before identifying the themes, I first reviewed the codes. As Table 4.6 showed, the codes were straightforward and highly related to the first research question: the importance of teacher-student classroom communication. In the interviews, participants were asked for reasons why they thought the classroom communication between teachers and students was or was not important. These reasons were extracted and then coded. After reading through the codes several times, a mind map was drawn to seek for the meaningful relationships between these codes. The codes with similar or the same meanings were clustered into larger patterns—thematic categories. According to Flicker (2013:26), this step was ‘contiguity-based’ and the connections were made based on categories instead of the raw data. However, there were codes existing independently, not relating to any category. The process of clustering thematic categories was exemplified in Figure 4.3. As was shown in the figure, ‘a way of knowing students’ thoughts’, ‘avoiding complaints from students’, and ‘building teacher-student rapport’ were initially coded from the excerpts and statements according to the reasons shared by the participants concerning the importance of teacher-student classroom communication. These three codes all indicated that the native English speaker language teacher participants considered communication as a channel to know more about the students so that conflicts and misunderstandings could be avoided, leading to fewer complaints from the students. Additionally, knowing more about the students also helped the teachers to know how to communicate with the students more effectively. It was beneficial to build trust and a good teacher-student relationship. Hence, these three codes were grouped together. Returning to the theoretical concepts discussed in Chapter 2, effective communication facilitated a good teacher-student relationship, which was helpful to teaching. I then decided the theme—teacher-student relationship. However, the code ‘a way of knowing students’ problems/difficulties/demands’ emphasized students’ problems in learning. Teachers might be able to help them solve the problems to ensure teaching and learning effect. Therefore, the codes were grouped to another category. As to the other four codes, they did not convey a similar or the same meaning and there was not an obvious relationship with any other code. As a result, they existed independently and corresponding individual themes were created. Cited

as an example, Figure 4.3 illustrated the process how thematic categories were created, which was clarified above. Table 4.7 was an example of the organized generated themes.

All these seemingly simple tables and figures are not able to display the complex and challenging process of handling the qualitative data. Despite the acknowledged difficulties, I adopted a robust system of thematic analysis which means that I can present my findings in the next chapter with confidence because I analyzed the data in a rigorous way.

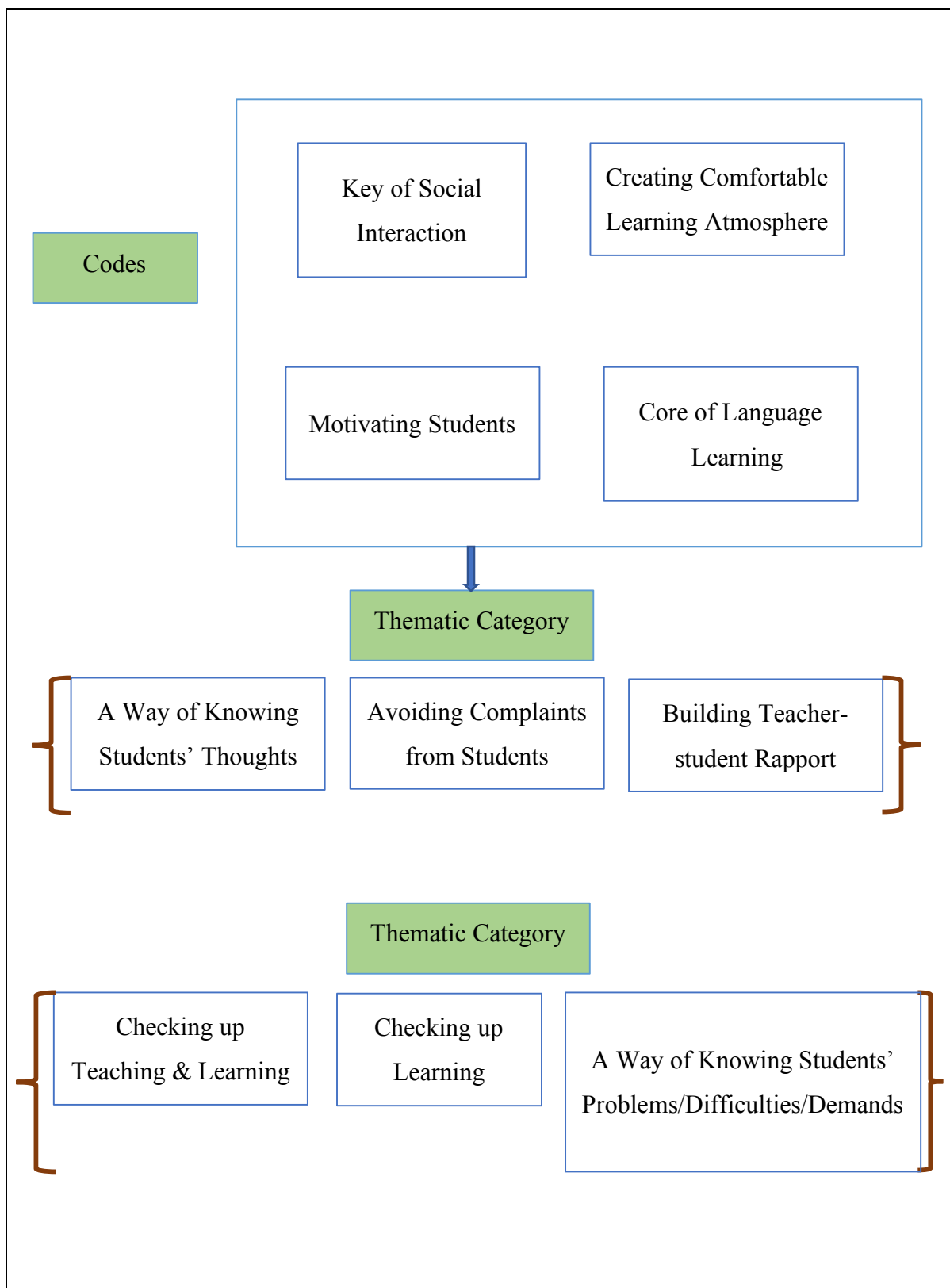


Figure 4.3 *Creation of Thematic Categories*

<b>Importance of Teacher-student Classroom Communication (theme generation)</b>	
<b>Native English Speaker Language Teacher Participants</b>	
Themes	1. An essential social skill
	2. Building and maintaining teacher-student relationship
	3. Motivating students
	4. Creating a relaxing/active classroom atmosphere
	5. Increasing the quality of teaching
	6. Communication as the core of language learning

Table 4.7 *Theme Generation-the Importance of T-S Classroom Communication (Native English Speaker Language Teacher Participants' Perspectives)*



Once the themes were devised, I reviewed the excerpts, statements and the codes to consider and check again the relationships and connections between them. On one hand, the coherence should be guaranteed. On the other hand, the validity of themes should be taken into account to ensure they accurately and precisely reflect and interpret the participants' meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Supported by what King (2004) notes that in the course of reviewing themes, important points being not covered and overlapping themes can be identified, I did find themes that did not have enough support from the data, themes that were not related to the research questions, and themes that should be separated into individual ones in the theme reviewing process. With careful consideration and judgment, the refined themes can ultimately be the succinct summary and representation of the data. Due to the iterative nature of qualitative research data analysis, I was allowed to revisit the data and ideas without limitation (Galletta, 2013) so that I could frequently go back to the raw data to examine the meanings, which enabled me to devise more accurate codes and themes to represent the participants' voices.

This section explains my complete and detailed thematic analysis process. Three holistic phases of familiarization of the raw data, coding and theme generation have been fully and transparently explained and clarified. Although Table 4.5, 4.6, 4.7 and Figure 4.3 were cited as examples showing how the data was analyzed concerning only one research question, the method and process of all the data analysis were all similar within all the research questions. In Chapter 5, I will interpret the meanings, report the findings, and search for the connections between the findings and the theories, thus linking and interconnecting the entire research. Before moving on to the discussion of the findings, pausing and scrutinizing the rigor of the data analysis process is essential.

### **4.2.3 Ensuring Rigor**

Scrutinizing the rigor of the research is necessary because it concerns the authenticity of the results or the conclusions of studies (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011). I contend that rigorously conducting research not only means collecting the data rigorously, but also analyzing data, interpreting meanings, and presenting findings rigorously as well (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Unlike quantitative study which many people would present truths via relatively objective statistics, qualitative study focuses

on the description of people's behaviors and attitudes which is often regarded as being subjective (Wolcott, 2005; Creswell, 2015). As a result, ensuring rigor is even more important for it decides whether the results can be more persuasive and trustworthy. In addition to being careful, I adopted different approaches to ensure rigor when analyzing the data.

Firstly, I accept what Firestone (1987), Potter and Hepburn (2012), Sandelowski (1995), and Malterud (2001) suggest that qualitative researchers should provide enough details to increase transparency which means that the data analysis process should be communicated and presented transparently. When analyzing the interview data, there was no strict criteria or standard requiring me to conduct the analysis within a particular procedure and abide by the rules provided by a manuscript of qualitative data analysis. Additionally, there are no general rules to judge the quality of the analysis of interview data (Freeman, Melissa, deMarrais, Kathleen, Preissle, Judith, Roulston, Kathryn & St. Pierre, 2007). Under the circumstances, it is useful to make details accessible so that the entire analysis process is displayed honestly. In the above sections, the description of how I analyzed the interview data was from different angles and covered various aspects. I discussed what preparation I had made, what tools I employed, and the detailed thematic analysis process. When I reflected on the data analysis process, I coded and created themes according to my personal understandings of the raw data and what I had learned from the literature. Biases might directly intrude, thus affecting the findings. I therefore went back to the participants to check the exact meanings they wanted to convey when there were vague meanings or there were points inconsistent with their previous meanings. Providing details of data analysis functioned as a warning urging me to be more cautious and reflect frequently. Furthermore, it was not only an opportunity to honestly show the strengths and weaknesses of the way I analyzed the data, but also a process of reflecting on the course so that I could make improvements. In short, providing enough detail is an effective method for it requires me to map the process, show important analytical choices, and be open about how the codes, categories, and themes have been developed (Anfara, Brown & Manglone, 2002), which all help to demonstrate rigor in qualitative data analysis.

Secondly, I accept what is recommended by Galletta (2013) and Silverman (1993) that making the data analysis able to be traced can also help to increase rigor. Flick (2014: 505) metaphorizes the importance of analytical trails as the 'backstage'. As the

above tables and figure showed, the steps were clearly recorded. There were memos and notes taken down on the hardcopy of the raw data as well. I argue that by doing this, it helps me to ensure rigor and make it convenient to return to any step to have a review. The trail of the data analysis process works as an ‘analytical thread’ linking each step (Galletta, 2013: 123).

The third strategy of analyzing the qualitative data in a rigorous way I adopted is ‘member checks’ (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015: 246). This means to return to the participants for the confirmation of the meanings interpreted. It is a way to prevent biases and misunderstandings (Maxwell, 2013).

Fourthly, not all the data can be presented, which means even after the analysis of interview data is complete, it always remains open to interpretation for I can always conduct the analysis from different angles or theoretical perspectives (Roulston, 2010b). When analyzing interview data, it is the researcher who sorts through the raw data, conducts the coding, identifies the themes, and decides what to present (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). It indicates that the presentation of data is often partial which brings challenges to the trustworthiness of the research results. However, I accept Roulston’s (2006) argument that there is no single qualitative analysis being able to represent all the data without missing one word. Wolcott (2009), and Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that continued reflection is an effective way to examine the rigor and trustworthiness. Taking the suggestion, I kept writing the reflexive journal when analyzing the data.

Lastly, analyzing the data ethically helps increase rigor as well since it is the researcher with ‘rigorous thinking’ and ‘intellectual rigor’ who can ensure rigor instead of the chosen methods, research design, or analytical skills (Patton, 2015: 703). Whether to show the codes and themes to my colleagues and have a peer review was one of the difficult ethical choices. I decided not to do it because of the promise to the participants of anonymity and confidentiality strategy. Sticking to promises, being conscious of ethics, and being reflexive in ethical issues are effective ways I adopted.

## **A Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter has covered how the data was collected from different aspects. The pre-interview preparations include the detailed process of recruiting three different groups of participants, the preparations for the interviews including decisions and

examinations of the interview locations, decision of language choices, recordings, checking the wording of interview questions, and providing consent forms before the interviews. At the interview stage, an example of interviewing one participant has been provided in detail to transparently demonstrate the research process so as to be more persuasive of the research. After collecting the data, the dilemmas of transcription and translation have been discussed and decisions have been made. I then examined what I had done to ensure rigor in the data collection process. Following the discussion of data collection, the thematic analysis process has been demonstrated step by step with figures and tables cited as examples. I then examined the rigor of the analytical process and illustrated what methods I adopted to ensure that I analyzed the data in a rigorous way. In the next chapter, I move on to report the findings in a systematic and logical way.

## **Chapter 5 Findings**

As Brinkmann (2013) illustrates, the data analysis technique presented in Chapter 4 has allowed me to determine the findings of my research and I now present them in this chapter. I accept what is emphasized by Merriam and Tisdell (2015) concerning the importance of reporting findings that if no one knows the results, no benefits can be obtained so that the research is meaningless. This chapter provides an opportunity to present the extracts from my participant data to support the claims I make from which I gained an understanding of my answers to my research questions and thus change knowledge and practice in this field. As clarified in Chapter 3, I decided to report the findings according to the sequence of my research questions. I then develop a theory through synthesizing the findings in Chapter 6.

### **5.1 Reporting the Findings**

In Chapter 5.1.1-5.1.4, I present the results according to the research questions in sequence:

- 1) What is the importance of teacher-student classroom communication?
- 2) What are the differences between native and non-native English language speaker teachers in terms of their practices of classroom communication?
- 3) What are the perceived causes and negative impacts of classroom communication problems or failures on teaching and learning?
- 4) What are the positive impacts of effective teacher-student communication on teaching and learning?

In Chapter 1, I have shared my interest in this research topic. I personally believe in the importance and the positive influences of effective teacher-student classroom communication on both teaching and learning. Therefore, the first question concerns the evidence or challenges of what I learned about the importance of communication through my research. The following three questions allow in-depth exploration into this topic and probe into the impacts of effective teacher-student classroom communication.

### 5.1.1 What is the Importance of Teacher-student Classroom Communication?

The first research and interview question explores the participants' attitudes towards the importance of teacher-student classroom communication in the English language class.

Among the five native English speaker language teacher participants, two of them regarded teacher-student classroom communication as a very important element, two more of them considered it as an important factor, and one of them hesitated and said '*it depends*'. However, at the end of the interviews, two participants changed 'important' to 'very important'. And the participant whose answer was '*it depends*' supplemented his attitudes by saying that teachers and students '*shall have a good communication*'. As the participant thought more deeply about teacher-student classroom communication during the interview process, he changed his attitude at the end of the interview. In contrast to the native English speaker language teacher participants, all of the non-native English speaker language teacher participants believed in the importance of classroom communication between teachers and students. During the interview process, they did not change their attitudes. Different from two groups of teacher participants, one student participant (S4) thought teacher-student classroom communication was of a little importance according to the first reaction. S4 was cited as an example in Chapter 4 because he was the only one of the Chinese participants who chose to be interviewed in English. In order to make sure he did not misunderstand or misinform his thoughts, I double-checked his answer. He confirmed his attitudes by saying

*The teacher-student communication can be related to some elements, the students' attention and interests.*

Extract from S4 data

But it was not important in all the accounts. This was a contrast with the other data. However, as the interview went on, S4 was asked whether he had encountered communication problems with teachers, and other related questions, he thought about his experiences and gradually changed his attitudes by saying:

*Communication is the most important, and pedagogy is based on the communication the teacher do to the students.*

Extract from S4 data

By contrast, two student participants uttered ‘*very important*’ and one student participant said ‘*important*’ without hesitation and held the same attitudes to the end of the interview.

In addition to the answers to whether teacher-student classroom communication was important, I used the reasons which the participants used to explain the importance of teacher-student classroom communication to create themes.

I use Figure 5.1 to present the findings and the themes generated from the data according to these different groups to answer my first research question. As discussed in Chapter 3, there are three different groups of participants. Therefore, I use three circles to represent these three groups of participants. The themes are displayed in three rectangles. As illustrated in Figure 5.1, there are overlapping themes generated from three groups of the participants. I use red to indicate the themes overlapping among all three groups of participants. The color yellow indicates the themes overlapping between the native and non-native English speaker language teacher participants. The overlapping themes between the non-native English speaker language teacher and the student participants are demonstrated in the color green. The color blue displays the overlapping themes between the native English speaker language teacher and the student participants. When the theme(s) does (do) not overlap with other groups, I use the color black to indicate the theme which was generated from one particular group’s raw data.

## Importance of Teacher-student Classroom Communication (Themes)

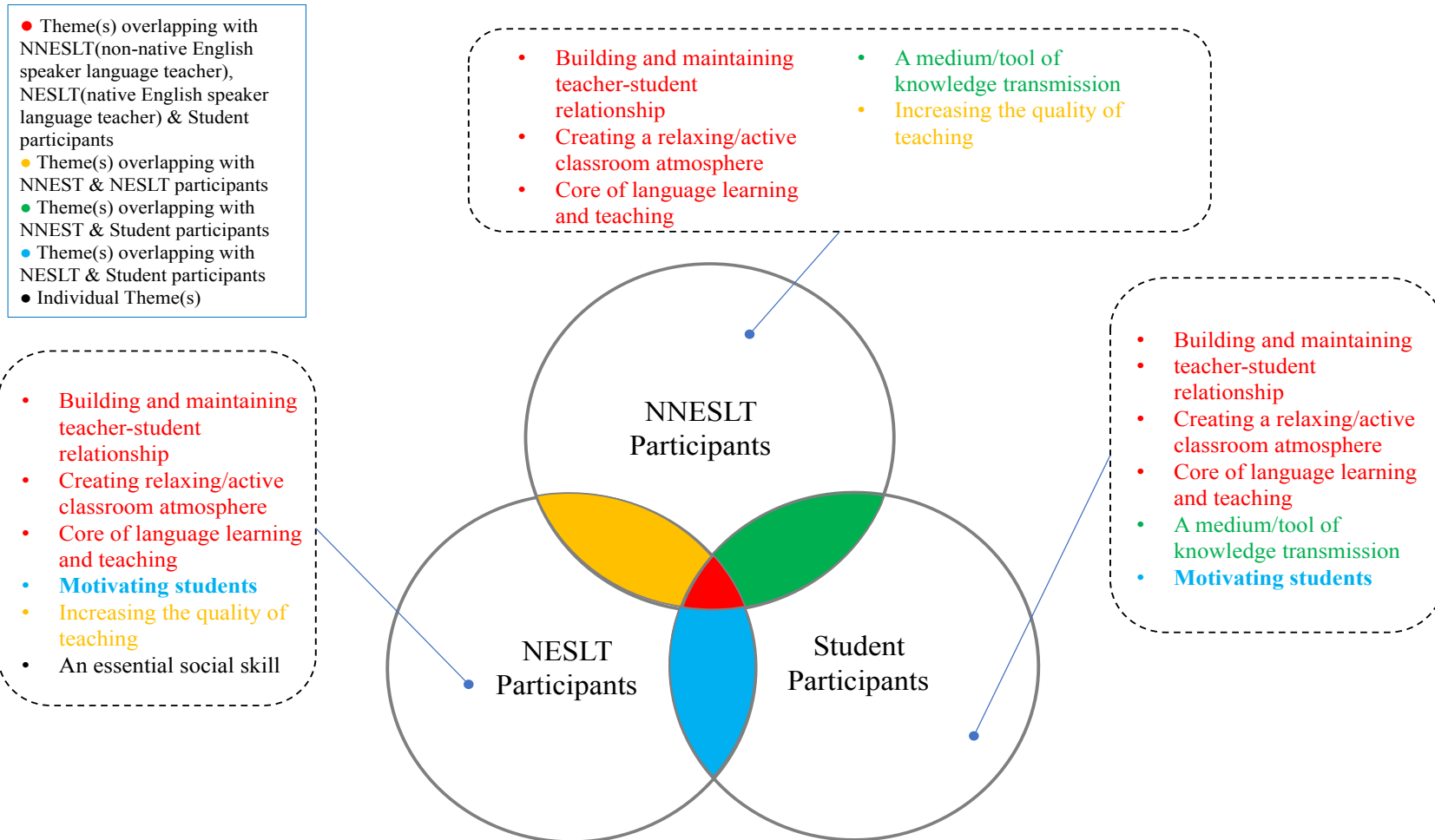


Figure 5.1 *the Importance of Teacher-student Classroom Communication*



Building and maintaining teacher-student relationship, creating a relaxing classroom atmosphere, and the core of language learning were mentioned most frequently as the importance of teacher-student classroom communication. Following them were motivating students, a medium/tool of knowledge transmission and increasing the quality of teaching. An essential social skill appears only in the native English speaker language teacher participants group. As discussed, influenced by Confucianism, the non-native English speaker language teachers and the students focus more on the pedagogical purposes of teacher-student classroom communication while the native English speaker language teachers focus more on the emotional connection and the application of the language. Therefore, the theme ‘an essential social skill’ only appears in the native English speaker language teacher participant group. These themes are discussed separately in detail in the following sections.

#### 1) Building and maintaining teacher-student relationship

The prevailing viewpoint of the participants is that effective communication facilitates the establishment of a good rapport with the students, which helps teachers know students better. According to N3,

*If you (students) have a teacher you like, you enjoy the class, you learn the material better, and you spend more time with the subject.*

Extract from N3 data

This accords with what I have learned from the literature in Chapter 2. It has been pointed out that a positive teacher-student relationship is an important element of teaching and learning (Frymier & Houser, 2000). Building a good teacher-student relationship had been mentioned by the participants from different groups frequently. Although they considered the issue from different angles, their beliefs in the benefits brought by a positive teacher-student relationship resonated with one another. N3 said firmly:

*They (students) feel comfortable with you...maybe more willing to ask questions, which can help to learn more things...they are not afraid to ask questions, not afraid to ask for help.*

Extract from N3 data

The standpoint that only when students like and trust teachers will they be more engaged in class, willing to communicate, spend more time and energy in the subject was highly agreed among the three groups of participants. However, N4 offered a different explanation by saying ‘*students could complain easily*’ if there was only ‘*strong criticism*’ rather than ‘*a good communication*’. N4 further explained that when students complained, it was a signal that they might dislike the course or the teacher, which might lead to a hostile teacher-student relationship. Consistent with other participants’ viewpoints, students did not want to learn from the teachers they did not like. Under the circumstances, students might lose interest and became less engaged and cooperative in class. However, according to N4, effective communication leads to fewer complaints which destroys the rapport between teacher and student. C1, C2, S1 also expressed similar thoughts. They believed that a positive teacher-student relationship helped to avoid emotional hurt and dissatisfaction since the university students were sensitive and easily hurt. C2 summarized that if teachers knew their students well, conflicts and misunderstandings could be reduced, which protected both teachers and students. Thus, mutual trust gradually developed, contributing to the establishment of a positive, solid and long-term relationship. C1 added:

*If a student doesn't like the teacher, I think whatever he, I think, he will have a negative feeling. Actually, it will, I think it will reduce learning efficiency by over ten percent, or it might be over twenty percent, or even more.*

Extract from C1 data

As mentioned above, although the participants shared their beliefs in the important roles teacher-student classroom communication plays in helping teachers and students build a positive relationship, their focuses were slightly different. N3 and C1 tended to focus more on the feelings while N4, C1, C2 and S1 focused more on the roles classroom communication played in reducing negatives. Moreover, C1 also emphasized the connection between a positive teacher-student relationship and students’ learning efficiency.

Drawing upon the participants' responses, I designed Figure 5.2 to demonstrate the complex and interconnected relationship of these elements. The words I used in the figure were exactly from what the participants said in the interviews.

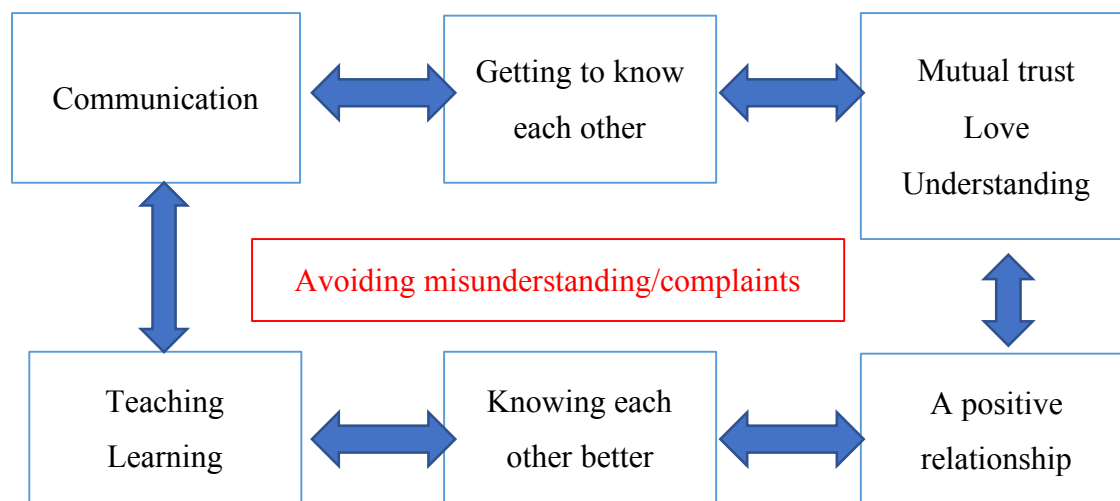


Figure 5.2 *The Relationship of 'Communication', 'Teacher-student Relationship' & 'Teaching & Learning'*

The blue two-way arrows in the figure indicate that these elements have mutual influences on each other. Classroom communication helps teachers and students get to know each other. In the process, mutual trust, love and understanding can be built so that a positive teacher-student relationship can be enhanced and maintained. According to the participants, they are more willing to communicate when the relationship is positive, thus positively influencing teaching and learning. To sum up, effective classroom communication between teachers and students is beneficial to both teaching and learning through building positive teacher-student relationships. The participants have provided reasons and evidence why a positive teacher-student relationship facilitates teaching and learning from two angles—promoting positive factors such as building mutual trust, love and understanding and avoiding negative emotions such as fear and dislike. According to the participants, positive factors might motivate students' learning interest and facilitate better understanding of knowledge. The benefits are long-term and a positive cycle as Figure 5.2 demonstrates will evolve. On the contrary, negative emotions might destroy the positive cycle because as the participants said, students did not want to learn from those who they did not like.

## 2) Creating a relaxing and active classroom atmosphere

The second dominant theme concerns classroom atmosphere. All three groups of participants mentioned how effective teacher-student classroom communication might contribute to creating a relaxing and active classroom atmosphere, which was an important element facilitating teaching and learning. According to the participants, in a relaxing and active environment, students would feel more comfortable and secure so that they would be more willing to communicate and learn. This is a positive cycle as Figure 5.3 shows. Effective communication helps teachers and students to create a relaxing and active classroom atmosphere in which both teachers and students feel more willing to communicate with each other, which is beneficial to make teacher-student classroom communication effective. This is a positive loop.

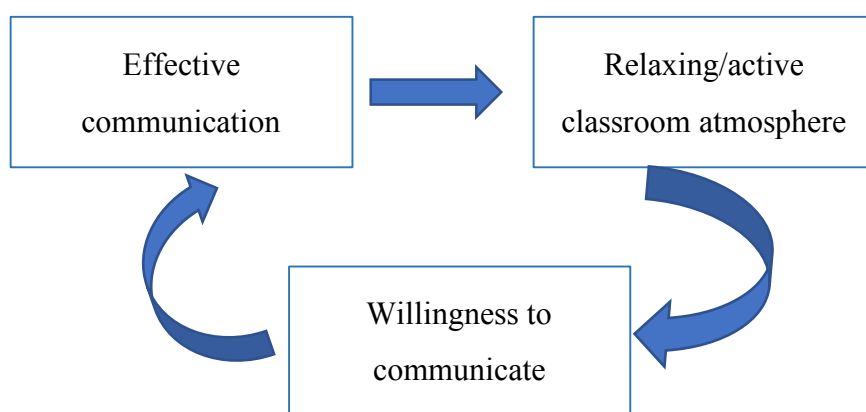


Figure 5.3 A *Positive Cycle*

Moreover, according to C2,

*Some simple and small talk, and this (something that) might be concerned with everyone's different ideas, interests...can make class atmosphere active, (and) it is necessary.*

Extract from C2 data

S2 shared the same viewpoints by adding that '*it can make the atmosphere of the class active when talking about some extra-curricular things*', and the active classroom atmosphere was important to stimulate students to be more willing to talk in class. Moreover, the teacher participants commented that they would also feel comfortable in a relaxing and active classroom atmosphere. According to the teacher participants, a

relaxing classroom atmosphere helped reduce teachers' stress so that they would focus on teaching. Meanwhile in an active classroom atmosphere, students were more engaged, cooperative and interactive, which psychologically stimulated teachers' desire to teach. C3 explained that *'every teacher feels happy to see students desire to learn and interact with you actively'* and this would *'function as a stimulus for teachers to teacher better because their students are good and they want to be good teachers as well'*. Additionally, C2 noted that a positive teacher-student relationship and a good learning environment were mutually reinforcing. S3 further pointed out that students not only felt safe, but enjoyed more freedom as well if the learning environment was comfortable. Under the circumstances, students would be more confident to share ideas, ask and answer questions, and enjoy learning without bearing the fear of being harshly criticized or humiliated when making mistakes. Criticism interrupts the arrow between willingness to communicate and effective teacher-student classroom communication.

### 3) Communication as the core of language learning/teaching

Language learning and teaching is also a concern since the context of the study is English language classes. N1 thought that communication:

*is part with the key for any sort, like interaction to, it's just like to critically communicate not just my ideas, but students' ideas, hum, with myself, and, and to each other...language is to communicate, to strengthen. It should be used to exchange ideas and interact.*

Extract from N1 data

According to N1, communication in language classes is special and different from non-language classes because communication is not only a medium or a tool to interact, get to know each other, exchange ideas or give instructions but a subject to practice as well. On one hand, communication is an essential social skill. It is an unavoidable element embedded in social life, including teaching and learning. N1's viewpoint accords with what have been discussed in Chapter 2 concerning the concept of communication. On the other hand, it is through communication in English, students can learn and use the language. N1 and N5 emphasized classroom communication was *'very important'* frequently in the interview because they believed that communication

was a *'core element'* in language classes. C4 and S1 also indicated that communication in a language class was a kind of *'language input and output'*. The key function of a language is to communicate. In this regard, classroom communication between teachers and students is inevitable, indispensable, and important in a language class as well. This is consistent with Senowarsito (2013) and Long's (1983) argument that classroom communication in language classes is not only a medium/tool, but also a learning object.

#### 4) Motivating students

The native English speaker language teacher group and the student group emphasized that another role of classroom communication was motivation. According to N4, there were students who were lacking motivation and needed to be motivated. When they got motivated, they had the confidence to learn and speak English. And effective communication such as encouragement rather than *'a strong criticism'* (N4) was a way to motivate students. This view was verified by the student participants. Two of the student participants believed that the communication and interaction between teachers and students would *'stimulate their learning motivation'* (S1, S2). They emphasized that the communication and interaction should be *'friendly and effective'*. On one hand, teachers should pay attention to the wording because harsh and humiliating words might easily bring emotional hurt rather than motivation. On the other hand, communicating effectively such as giving clear instructions and explain vague and difficult points could bring confidence and *'a sense of achievement'* (S4) so that students' learning motivation would be highly stimulated. S4 emphasized the importance of classroom communication as a tool to transmit knowledge and he admitted that the sense of achievement came from his understanding knowledge and teachers' instructions, which would stimulate his motivation. Different from S1, S2 and N4 believed that the motivation could come through the positive personal relationships. According to N4, when there was mutual trust between teachers and students, students were more easily motivated because when they liked the teacher, they would be inclined to believe in what the teacher said and made efforts in the course. This was supported by S1 and S2 who commented that they would *'get motivated easily because you believed the teacher is good and what he/she says is for the sake of your benefit'* and they would *'put more energy in the course to get high scores in order not to disappoint the teacher'*.

##### 5) Increasing the quality of teaching

The two groups of teacher participants paid more attention to ensuring and increasing teaching quality. Both native and non-native English language speaker teacher participants mentioned that classroom communication was a useful tool to *'make sure that the class's following'* (N2), *'check up the students'* (N2), *'know if the students need help'* (N2) and *'make sure they (students) can motivate in classroom'* (C1, C2). Based on their viewpoints, providing help when students need it, making sure students are able to follow the teachers, and getting students motivated are all significant factors of ensuring and increasing teaching quality. The participants noted that if teachers could offer immediate feedback and help, students' emotional arousal would be stimulated, which accords with Mazer's (2013) argument. And this is beneficial to attracting students' attention so that more information might be received and encoded more easily. C2 emphasized that since the difficulties and problems were solved in a timely manner, students would be able to understand the teaching content thoroughly and continue to learn other content. At the same time, learning better and easily could make students motivated and cognitively interested in the subjects, which promotes better learning outcomes (Harp & Mayer, 1997; Glaser-Zikuda & Fuss, 2008). This is consistent with the discussion in Chapter 2. Moreover, the student participants indicate that overcoming difficulties and solving problems helps to eliminate obstacles in learning and catch up with the class, resulting in more interest in learning the subject. According to N2, when the teachers were not able to notice the students' difficulties, they would fail to provide timely help. The students would gradually be unable to follow the class, feel hopeless and lose interest. In short, classroom communication is a medium to check up on individual student's understanding of the teaching content so as to ensure and increase the quality of teaching.

##### 6) A medium/tool of knowledge transmission

The theme that classroom communication facilitates the transmission of knowledge was put forward by both the non-native English speaker teacher and the student participants. Chapter 2 has discussed the legacy of Confucian educational culture, which lays emphasis on teacher-centered lecturing mode. In this mode, teachers transmit knowledge via talking all the time. Chinese teachers and students are accustomed to this lecturing mode. Therefore, when asked about the importance of

communication, this may have influenced the high value placed on the function of transmitting knowledge. C3 emphasized the fundamental role of classroom communication played by saying that

*Teaching itself is a process of communication...as long as there is the transmission of knowledge, the medium must be communication...according to a normal and conventional teaching mode, all the transmission of knowledge should be based on communication.*

Extract from C3 data

C3 used a metaphor to further demonstrate the importance of classroom communication as a medium of knowledge transmission:

*The better the bottle is, the value of the wine contained, perhaps just a part, the price will be higher... The higher the quality of communication is, the higher efficiency and validity of the transmission of knowledge will be.*

Extract from C3 data

This viewpoint was supported by the majority of the participants from all groups.

#### 7) An essential social skill

Among all the participants, one native English speaker language teacher participant stated that the importance of communication was not just limited to the classroom, but to the human life. It is an essential social skill. People live in a world where social activities rely on communication. In Chapter 2, the inevitability of communication has been discussed. No one can avoid communication (Wazlawick, Bavelas & Jackson, 1967). It is the same in a classroom setting.

Referring back to Chapter 2, these seven themes generated from the raw data align with what has been discussed and what has been learned from the literature.



### **5.1.2 What Are the Differences between Native and Non-native English Speaker Language Teachers in terms of their Practices of Classroom Communication?**

The participants' responses to the first research question emphasized the importance of teacher-student classroom communication in EFL classes. However, as discussed in Chapter 2, teacher-student classroom communication in a Chinese context makes it unique because of cultural impacts. For example, as illustrated, the impacts of Confucianism on Chinese classroom communication such as the emphasis on hierarchical status, moral education, hard work, learning by repetition and lecture-mode teaching might be factors influencing the communication between teachers and students. In order to answer my second research question and find out more details about what happens in terms of communication in language classes taught by two different groups of teachers, and to appeal to more awareness of the field and better practice of classroom communication, I asked for the participants' experiences of differences in communicating with native and non-native English speaker language teachers. This question has been originally designed aimed at student participants. However, since these two groups of language teachers occasionally had activities such as observing each other's classes and discussing pedagogies, I asked the two groups of teacher participants the question as well.

Figure 5.4 has listed the differences of native and non-native English speaker language teachers in terms of communicating with their Chinese students. There are overlapping themes among three groups of the participants which I will present below. In order to maintain consistency throughout the thesis, I still use three circles to represent these three groups of participants to mirror the approach used in the first research question. The themes concerning the differences of how native and non-native English speaker language teachers communicate with their students are displayed in three rectangles. I use red to indicate the themes overlapping among all three groups of participants. The color yellow indicates the themes overlapping between the native and non-native English speaker language teacher participants. The overlapping themes between the non-native English speaker language teacher and the student participants are demonstrated in the color green. The color blue displays the overlapping themes between the native English speaker language teacher and the student participants. When

the theme(s) does (do) not overlap with other groups, I use the color black to indicate the theme which was generated from one particular group's raw data.

## Differences of Native and Non-native English Speaker Language Teachers in terms of the Practices of Classroom Communication (Themes)

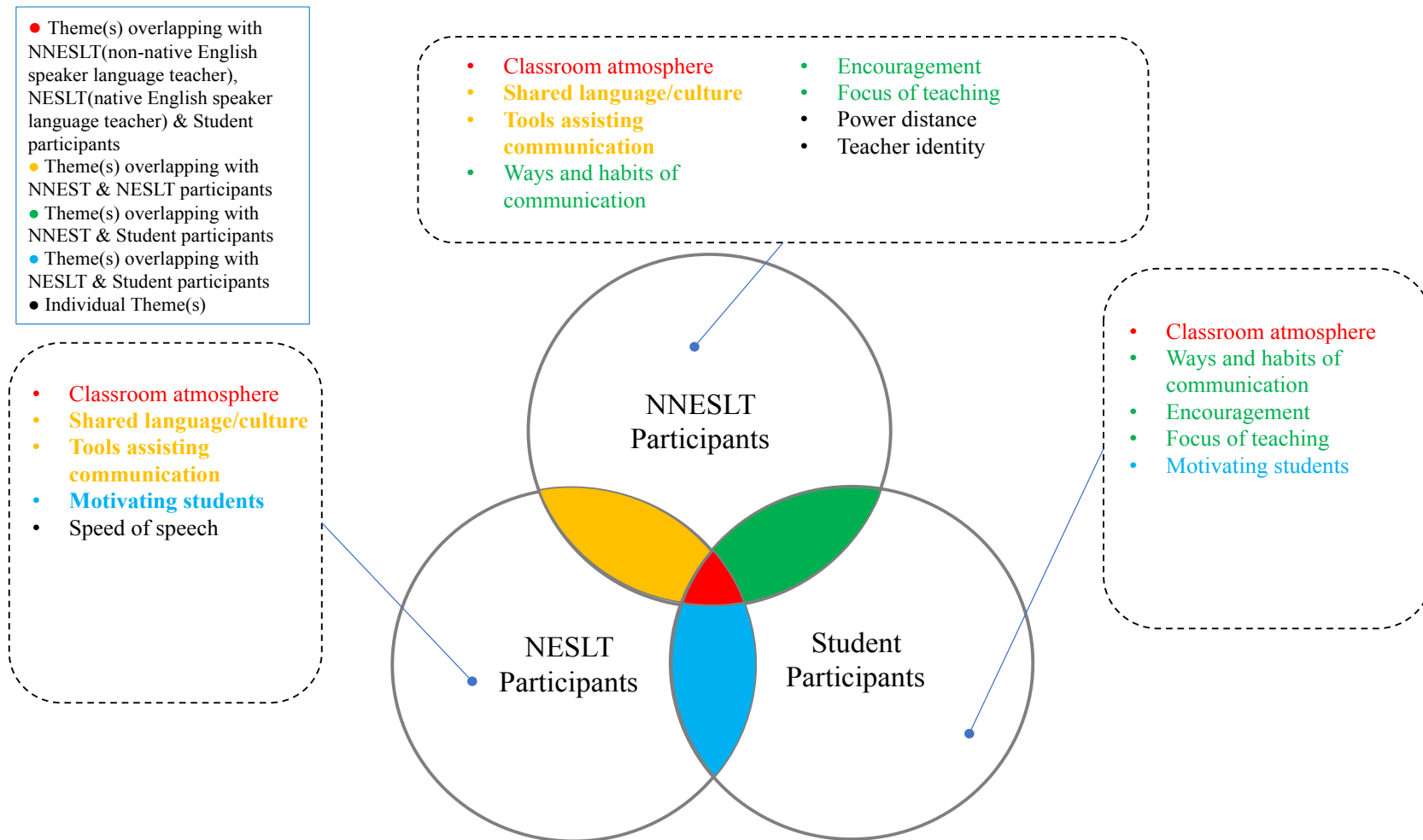


Figure 5.4 Differences of Native and Non-native English Speaker Language Teachers Concerning their Practices of Classroom Communication

### 1) Classroom atmosphere/dynamic

The importance of classroom atmosphere and dynamic were mentioned by all the three groups. When analyzing the data, it was unexpected that the theme ‘classroom atmosphere’ was dominant referring to the differences of teachers’ communication with their students. The participants’ explanations and the cycle demonstrated in Figure 5.3 might clarify the reasons for this. Effective communication contributes to a relaxing classroom atmosphere. Both teachers and students are more willing to communicate in a relaxing classroom atmosphere. As Figure 5.3 shows, this forms a positive loop. My argument that the answers and themes do not exist independently but are closely interconnected and interwoven is supported by Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2017). However, I am separating the findings here for clarity.

Compared with the student participants, the teacher participants were restrained and they pointed out that ‘*differences of culture would create different dynamic in the classroom*’ (N3) and ‘*Chinese teachers are more familiar with the students*’ (N3). C2 also noted that the classroom atmosphere was different because when the students failed to understand their non-native English speaker language teachers, they could ‘*speak Chinese*’ and ‘*explain difficult points in Chinese*’. Thus, these two groups of teachers communicated differently with the students and meanwhile the different communication created a different classroom dynamic. In addition, the non-native English speaker teacher participants added that native English speaker teachers tended to maintain the classroom atmosphere via communication, making the way they communicated with the students different. For instance, according to C2, native English speaker language teachers paid more attention to creating an active classroom atmosphere by causal and extracurricular talks such as sharing life experiences and talking about interesting experiences. C2 emphasized that compared with native English speaker language teachers, the communication between non-native English speaker language teachers with their students was limited to knowledge transmission rather than personal communication. Unlike the teacher participants, the student participants said directly that the classroom atmosphere was more open and they tended to integrate ‘*a lot of non-content related communication and life into his teaching*’ (S1). By contrast, S1 felt that the non-native English speaker language teachers focused more on the syllabus and their communication was more formal and content-based. However, S2 and S3 noted that although the classroom atmosphere was more open in native English speaker language teachers’ classes, and they could talk and share ideas freely, the communication could still be hindered due to students’ English level. S3 said that

*(when) I don't understand...sometimes the foreign teacher will be angry...because you don't respond, and he doesn't think you are listening to him...and we are more likely that we dare not speak...we are scared...and it's weird you walk to the front and tell him you don't understand what he is talking about'.*

Extract from S3 data

As a result, the dynamic would change when students kept silent and failed to interact. In the circumstances, the native English speaker language teachers might be irritated and the classroom atmosphere would change correspondingly. This is supported by other two student participants.

## 2) Encouragement

Encouragement is another difference noted by the non-native English speaker language teacher participants and the student participants. C1 and C2 thought native English speaker teachers were more likely to encourage students because they cared about students' feelings more than the non-native English speaker teachers did. According to C1, *'we (non-native English speaker teachers) are like, these are our Chinese students, I've already known so much about you'*. So they did not consider being particularly polite was necessary. As a result, they tended not to encourage so frequently to satisfy students' emotional demands. Instead, they encouraged students when they thought their students were good enough and deserved the encouragement. In addition to C1, C2 recalled her experience as a student and said *'I've met foreign teachers before, some foreign teachers will say 'good job' no matter how you did it'*. As stated in Chapter 2, the research was conducted in the Chinese context. Influenced by Chinese culture, Chinese teachers (non-native English speaker language teachers) did not encourage as frequently as native English speaker language teachers. C2 created a metaphor to illustrate more vividly: *'It's like others (non-native English speaker teachers) look for bones in eggs, but he (native English speaker teachers) can find eggs in bones'*. C2 meant that native English speaker teachers would spare no efforts seeking for whatever was good of the students to encourage them, which was helpful to motivate the students. Nevertheless, N4, as a native English speaker teacher participant, he assumed that he encouraged more. But after he attended and observed non-native English speaker teachers' classes, he witnessed they also encouraged the students frequently. These were teacher participants' perspectives. However, the viewpoints varied among the student participants. S2 and S4 were the two student

participants who believed non-native English speaker teachers encouraged more. By contrast, S3 said that she spoke more actively in native English speaker teachers' classes for they were likely to encourage and praise everyone so that she felt more confident and less stressed. However, she was not willing to talk in classes taught by non-native English speaker language teachers. S3 shared her experience in the middle school:

*...when I was in middle school, my score was below average. It's kind of, didn't pay attention. It's like, (teachers) didn't encourage me a lot. If they encouraged, they encouraged good students. I was, kind of silent, and kept silent afterwards, for a long time.*

Extract from S3 data

S3 said that the non-native English language teacher in her middle school seldom communicated with her because she was not a student who spoke English well or could get high scores. Even when S3 was required to answer questions, she was seldom praised. She got accustomed, disappointed, indifferent, and less engaged gradually. In Chapter 2, it has been discussed that scores are still highly valued in China. It is believed that hard work, repeated practice, listening carefully to lectures and taking down notes contribute to the achievement of high scores rather than non-content related classroom communication. In the meantime, content-related communication such as transmission of knowledge and answering questions correctly are more valued. In the case, when S3 was not able to speak English well or give standardized answers in the language class, she would not be encouraged or praised by her teacher. S3's experience was heartbreaking to me, both as a researcher and a teacher. Emotional factors such as learning attitudes might indirectly affect learning outputs. In highlighting the importance of encouragement as one kind of classroom communication, my research participants exemplify the proposal of Beets, Cardinal and Alderman (2010), and Yuan (2019) that encouragement helps to stimulate students to be more confident and lead to better and improved academic behavior via verbal support.

### 3) Shared language/culture

Another difference of the practices of communication between the two groups of teachers lies in the shared language and culture. Non-native English speaker language teachers shared the same language and culture with their students, which made the classroom

communication different from that of the native English speaker language teachers. Both the two groups of teacher participants considered it as an obvious and inevitable difference in communication with the Chinese (non-native English speaker) students. Moreover, this difference was regarded as an advantage of classroom communication to non-native English speaker language teachers in a language class. The sharing language and culture made *'Chinese teachers much easier to communicate'* (N1) since the non-native English speaker teachers were able to choose familiar content of talks for their students and speak Chinese when necessary. Although the student participants did not consider it as a difference, when talking about the perceived causes of communication problems, three of them mentioned that they would speak Chinese when there were difficulties in understanding in English and they also regarded it as a strength of their non-native English speaker teachers concerning communication. S1 noted that *'as to Chinese teacher, actually, we both use Chinese'*. S3 supported this view by saying that *'Chinese teachers are all right, because they can speak Chinese'*. In addition, non-native English speaker language teachers had received education in the same context with their students. As mentioned in Chapter 2, even when students know the answers, they do not often say it directly because they have been taught to behave modestly and obey the rules in class. Usually they raise hands and wait to be called, and there are also students giving teachers' hints (such as eye contact) that they want to be called to answer the question. This was S4's experience and he thought that the non-native English speaker language teachers would understand his *'clue'* more easily and the communication would be more smooth because of the shared culture. S3 also shared the similar viewpoints by saying that *'foreign teachers, he might be, he has a different culture and he cannot understand'*. According to S3, native English speaker language teachers might not be happy when the students kept silent because they did not notice the cultural difference. Instead they considered students' silence as being rude, absent-minded or indifferent.

#### 4) Ways/habits of communication

C1, C3 and C4 expressed the difference in the way that native English speaker language teachers communicated with their students by saying that they talked more politely, casually and even more cautiously. These three participants felt that the way the native English speaker teachers talked was more emotion-based and they valued the maintenance of emotional connections and students' feelings. By contrast, non-native English speaker teachers talked in a more rigid and formal way. However, S1 and S2 interpreted the difference from a different

angle. Although S1 and S2 admitted the ways and habits of talking were different, neither of them thought where the teachers came from, or whether they were native or non-native English speakers caused the difference. Instead, they believed it was the teachers' personality that brought the differences in how the teachers communicated with their students. S1 pointed out:

*I think the teachers, there are relatively severe teachers, and there are quite amiable teachers...compared with K, he's kind of enthusiastic...but M, he might be relatively introverted...I think it depends on the person's (personality)...if he's very, very amiable, I'll have the thought that I want to communicate with him... being very strict might make some students not willing to speak.*

Extract from S1 data

The viewpoint that how teachers and students communicate in class is influenced by their personalities was put forward by the teacher participants as well. Nevertheless, the teacher participants C2 and C3 believed that it was students' personalities that had a huge impact on teacher-student classroom communication. For instance, students who were introverted and timid were less likely to be willing to talk in class.

#### 5) Tools assisting communication

Both the teacher groups noted that using body language, expressions, proverbs, idioms and sayings was another difference between native and non-native English speaker language teachers in the way they communicated with the students. N4 said that he would use idioms or proverbs to explain the meanings or difficult points to help students understand since native English speaker language teachers were not able to speak Chinese. Besides, he believed that body language was a useful tool to facilitate communication in a foreign language class as well. However, this theme was not mentioned by the student participants.

#### 6) Focus of teaching

This section deals with one function of communication in the classroom—the medium or a tool of teaching. Focus of teaching is a theme generated from the data of the student and non-native English speaker language teacher participants. The communication in a language class has decided the complexity of this topic because language is not only a learning target but also a tool and a medium to transmit knowledge and exchange information. The function



of communication is not just limited to facilitating teaching such as building teacher-student relationship or creating a friendly learning environment. Instead, communication also allows students to practice the target language. Therefore, referring to the differences of communication between the two different groups of teachers, the theme was defined as ‘focus of teaching’ rather than ‘focus of communication’. According to the participants, native English speaker language teachers paid more attention to the two-way language input and output, practice and application while non-native English speaker language teachers valued knowledge transmission more when communicating with the students. C2 commented that

*I think Chinese teachers are more like, focus on teaching content...Chinese teachers pay more attention to the transmission of knowledge to you...but I think as to foreign teachers, there might be more emotional things’.*

Extract from C2 data

C4 further illustrated that

*To foreigners, he (they) thinks the so-called knowledge acquirement is through experience, or some output of ideas.*

Extract from C4 data

Hence, when they talked, asked for feedback, or shared ideas, they communicated with the students and meanwhile they taught the target language. All the communication in a class has a pedagogical purpose (Nassaji & Wells, 2001), which is agreed by the participants. As native English speakers, their communication with students itself is a kind of teaching, in which students practice and learn how the language is applied as a tool in real life. By contrast, non-native English speaker language teachers’ communication ‘*focuses on the one-way transmission of knowledge*’ (C3). N1, C2 and C3 believed that the cause of the difference in communication resulted from the different teaching philosophy rather than whether English was a first language to the teachers.

## 7) Motivating students

The native English speaker teacher participant N4 observed that non-native English speaker teachers' words could always get the students motivated while the student participant S2 held the opposite opinion by saying that

*Our foreign teacher, it's like, make me feel relatively...compared with Chinese teacher, kind of open...in class, he tries to make us active more than the Chinese teacher.*

Extract from S2 data

Although the viewpoints were different, both of them pointed out one important point that the function and role of classroom communication not only lay in transmitting knowledge, but also in many other significant aspects facilitating teaching and learning.

Motivating students was frequently mentioned by the native English speaker language teacher group and the student group although they did not go deeper during the interview process.

## 8) Speed of speech

N2 pointed out that native English speaker language teachers were more likely to speak too quickly while the non-native English speaker language teachers would not have that problem because '*they already know*' if they spoke too fast. Since they were native speakers, they would not be aware of the speaking speed frequently when talking in the first language. This viewpoint was also agreed by N1 and N5. Speed of speech appeared in the native English speaker language teacher group. Since English was the only language used to communicate with the students, they were sensitive to their speaking speed. They considered it as a difference between these two groups of teachers.

## 9) Teacher identity and power distance

These two themes were highly summarized by one non-native English speaker teacher participant who strongly emphasized that different educational contexts resulted in huge differences in communication style between native and non-native English speaker language teachers. C3 commented that the Chinese traditional education mode influenced by Confucianism might lead to the ignorance of classroom communication. Knowledge transmission was considered as the most important and exclusive function or role of classroom

communication. Any non-content related communication would be deemed as meaningless because non-native English speaker language teachers *'think himself (themselves) as a knowledge transmitter and he (they) probably care(s) about playing his (their) role(s) better'*. On the contrary, native English speaker language teachers cared more about whether the communication was *'two-way'* (C3), whether there was feedback or idea-sharing because they believed teaching and learning could happen in two-way communication especially in a language class. N2 mentioned this point when talking about her problems communicating with the students by saying that *'I wish (teacher-student classroom communication) was a little bit more two-way'*. Moreover, according to C3, *'there is power distance between him (teachers) and the student...and this decides there is already a communication failure between them (teacher and student), to some extent'*. The hierarchical status decided the power distance so that the communication happening in a non-native English speaker teacher's class would always be different from a native English speaker teacher's class for the former could not be conducted on equal terms. C3's standpoints were consistent with what had been discussed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 concerning how Confucianism impacted Chinese people's educational beliefs and behaviors.

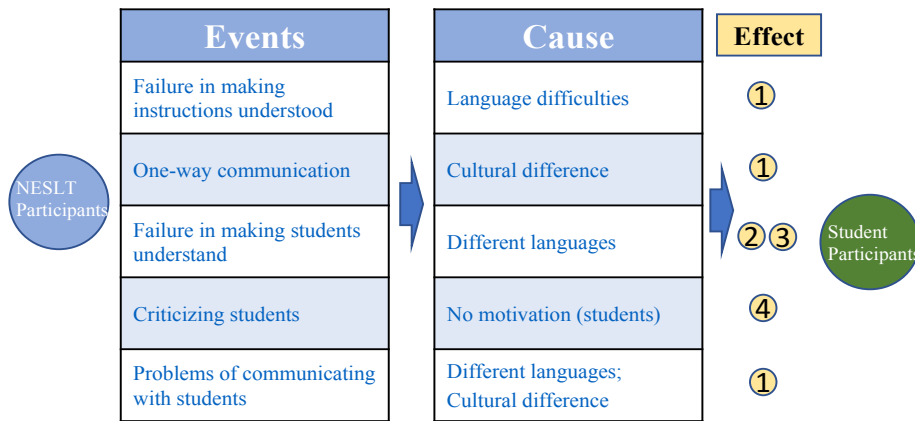
In summary, from the experiences and descriptions of the participants, it is indicated that cultural differences are not the only perceived cause of the differences. Additionally, the participants described different experiences and expressed different viewpoints in who encouraged more, who could more easily motivate students, and whose classroom atmosphere was more relaxing and active, what they shared still presented the diverse roles communication played in classroom and the importance of classroom communication in promoting teaching and learning. With more in-depth details exposed and meanings interpreted, the importance of teacher-student classroom communication was found in various aspects concerning both teachers' and students' psychological needs rather than only limited to pedagogical purposes.

### **5.1.3 What Are the Perceived Causes and Negative Impacts of Classroom Communication Problems or Failures on Teaching and Learning?**

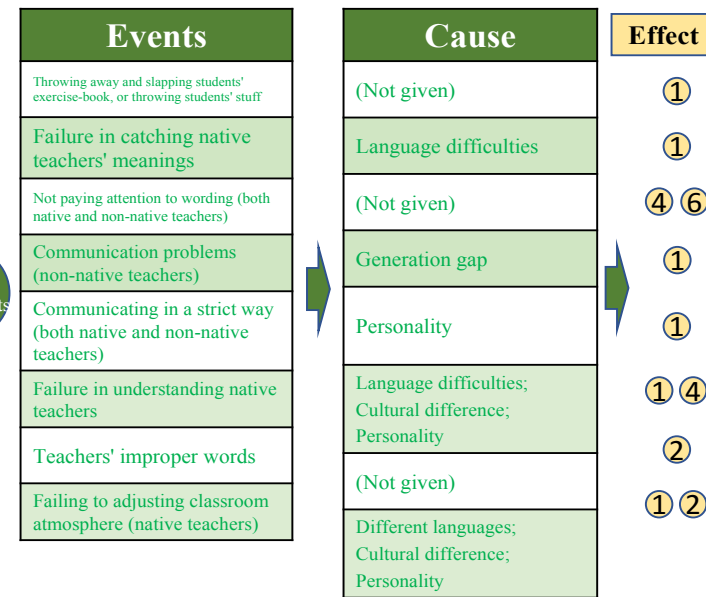
After sharing the differences the participants experienced or observed, they were asked to talk about the communication problems that they had encountered, and the perceived causes and the negative impacts of communication problems on teaching and learning.

Figure 5.5 presents the findings and themes generated from my data concerning this issue. I use the color blue to indicate the native English speaker language teacher participants, the color red to indicate the non-native English speaker language teacher participants, and the color green to indicate the student participants. I present what happened and the participants' perceived causes of the problems in the figure. As shown in Figure 5.5, the color yellow is used to present all the effects caused by teacher-student classroom communication problems. I use different numbers to indicate the type of effect caused by the particular events. Although there are overlapping effects, each event experienced by the participants was unique because the context, feelings, time and space were all different.

### Perceived Causes and Effects of Teacher-student Classroom Communication Problems



### Perceived Causes and Effects of Teacher-student Communication Problems



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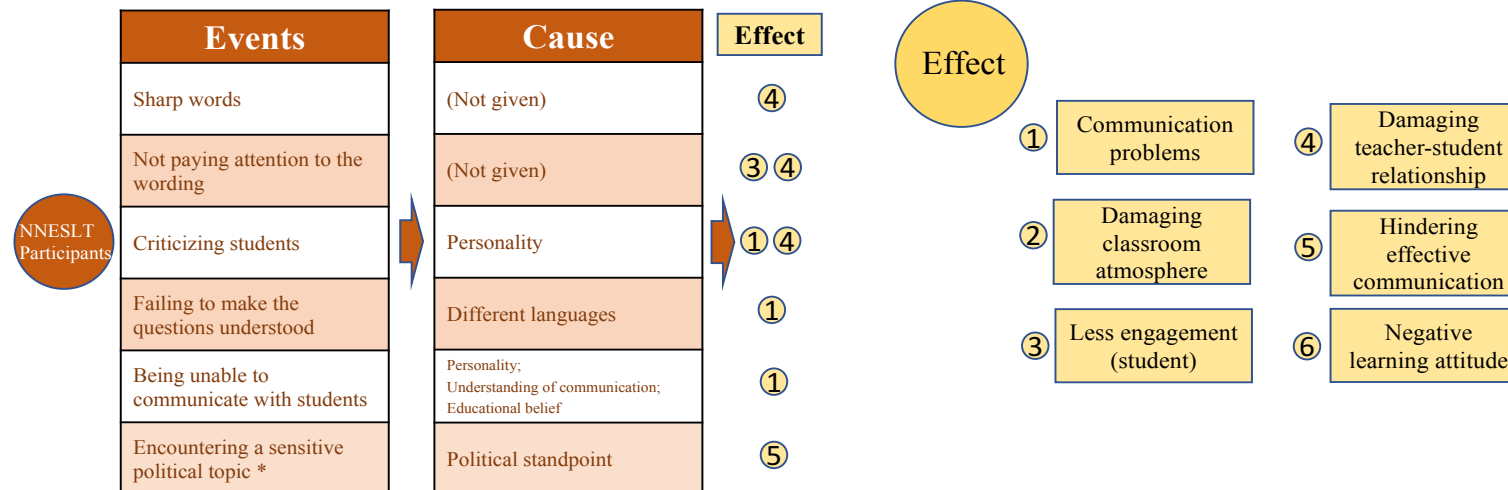


Figure 5.5 Causes and Effects of Teacher-student Classroom Communication Problems

As shown in Figure 5.5, according to the native English speaker language teacher participants, students' English level and cultural differences are two main factors causing communication problems between teachers and students in class. In the above section, both the native English speaker teacher and student participants regarded 'being able to speak in Chinese' as both a difference and an advantage in terms of classroom communication. The language problem mainly resulted in the understanding of teachers' instructions and the failure in giving feedback. When N1 did not simplify what he wanted the students to do, or when '*it was too complex or too many words...the communication wasn't focused*'. From N1's perspective, students' English level had a '*huge influence*' on teacher-student classroom communication. This was supported by the student participants S1 and S3, saying that the students would keep silent and give no feedback when they did not understand teachers' meanings or instructions. Under the circumstances, the native English speaker teachers might get angry because they thought they were ignored or the students were absent-minded while the students felt fearful and unwilling to talk, which made it a negative circle. This not only caused communication problems, but also threatened teacher-student relationships, harmed the classroom atmosphere and made the students less engaged and lose interest in class. All of the three groups of the participants agreed on the viewpoints. According to C2,

*there is such kind of situation like, I said some English, and they, and there were students who were at a loss, and didn't know what you were talking about.*

Extract from C2 data

From the analysis of my data, students' English level is one of the main perceived causes hindering teacher-student communication in EFL classes. This is supported by the majority of the participants from all groups.

In addition to the language problem, N2 believed that culture was another inevitable factor hindering or promoting communication. N2 thought

*students in China are very much more used to a lecture mode where the teacher talks the whole time, the students listen the whole time. Class in America, like almost no classes are like this.*

Extract from N2 data

Lastly, besides the perceived causes discussed above, N4 considered students' learning motivation and attitudes as one of the perceived causes of communication problems as well. According to him, when the students were found to have no or little motivation and negative learning attitudes, he would either criticize them or tell the class tutor (so that the students might be criticized or punished for their poor performance in class). However, this might ruin the teacher-student relationship. N4 believed that only when students communicated with teachers more, would they have positive learning attitudes and performances and vice versa. They were mutually influential.

Compared with the native English speaker language teacher participants, the non-native English speaker language teacher participants interpreted the causes of classroom communication problems between teachers and students from a different perspective. Both C2 and C3 laid emphasis on students' personality as one critical factor leading to classroom communication problems. According to C2, there were students who were '*too sensitive*' and '*mentally vulnerable*' to endure any negative evaluation. When teachers criticized them for their poor academic performances and behaviors, they would be hurt and refuse to communicate. This kind of students would even be unhappy with teachers' unintentional words, thus behaving in a rebellious way. In this situation, the communication problems were not typical ones but more individual instead. C2 believed that the teacher-student relationship would be negatively affected and students' engagement would decrease. Besides, C2 also mentioned that although non-native English speaker language teachers could speak Chinese, it did not indicate that language problems would not hinder communication since English was the '*target and principal language*' in class. Different from C2, C3 viewed this issue both from the teacher and student's perspectives. On one hand, as reported, C3 was the one who believed that education in China had been influenced by traditional Confucianism and the educational beliefs such as the lecture-mode and power distance between teachers and students were deeply rooted. Hence, '*Chinese teachers will totally neglect communication*'. C3 further commented that because of the shared culture and the feeling of authority, non-native English speaker teachers thought they knew the students very well so that they might not talk cautiously. By contrast, the native English speaker language teachers would be more careful and tolerant to the students and vice versa. As a result, there would be more communication problems between non-native English speaker teachers and their Chinese students. On the other hand, C3 thought that different understandings of the concept of communication might be another factor leading to communication problems. According to C3, there might be

students who preferred ‘*indirect communication*’ and they ‘*could not accept very direct teachers*’. C3 explained that this kind of students chose to talk when they thought it was necessary and they believed this was a good way of communication. This kind of students believed that keeping silence did not mean refusing to communicate. Instead, it meant they did not think it was appropriate or there was any need to talk under the circumstances. Communicating when needed and keeping a distance made them comfortable. This was what they understand as an effective classroom communication mode. For example, when they did not have any comment or they were not empathetic towards what the teachers said, they did not give feedback and kept silent. However, when teachers might wish to have feedback all the time even if it was ‘I don’t know’. This was regarded as ‘*being too direct*’ (C3) because the teachers might push them to respond, which was not a good way of communication. Under the circumstances, communication problems would arise. C3 ascribed it to different understandings of classroom communication. This is supported by the student participant group. The last event in the non-native English speaker language teacher participants’ findings (encounter a sensitive political topic) was marked with a star sign since the communication problem did not really happen between the non-native English speaker language teacher participant and his students. The story was told and experienced by one of C4’s students and C4 shared it as an illustration of the factor leading to communication problems. A sensitive political topic was raised by a native English speaker teacher, resulting in not severe but unhappy argument. When C4 heard the story, he believed it was different political standpoints that caused the problem. According to C4,

*He (native English speaker language teacher) doesn’t mean that, but the education he received in their culture is like that, but it’s different from ours...our political standpoint is different.*

Extract from C4 data

This viewpoint is supported by two student participants.

To sum up, language, students’ personality, educational beliefs, different understandings of communication and political standpoints are five main causes leading to communication problems and adversely affecting teacher-student relationship provided by non-native English speaker participants.



Like the native and non-native English speaker language teacher participants' viewpoints on the perceived causes and consequences of teacher-student communication problems, the student participants had also noted the themes 'language' and 'cultural differences' as two perceived causes of communication problems. The generation gap was newly put forward as a perceived cause of communication problems. Besides, the theme 'personality' mentioned as a factor influencing teacher-student classroom communication by the student participants was differently interpreted from the non-native English speaker language teacher participants. Firstly, the generation gap was mentioned by S2 who thought that the generation gap might lead to misunderstandings. S2 shared his experience by saying that:

*It was in the past, in my high school, some tiny misunderstandings in communication...it will be all right after communicating...it's like, because of the generation gap.*

Extract from S2 data

According to S2, the '*tiny misunderstandings*' would occasionally happen between S2 and his non-native English speaker teachers. S2 emphasized that due to the differences in their ages, teachers and students might share few common interests, thus resulting in unfamiliarity with each other's topics and focuses. This was believed as a reason why communication problems arose. Additionally, the student participants thought teachers' personality might trigger communication problems while students' personality was regarded as one perceived cause of communication problems by the teacher participants. According to S1, S3 and S4, teachers' personalities varied. There were teachers who were strict, rigid, arrogant and even fierce. S3 said that '(teacher's) *being very strict might make some students not willing to speak...dare not speak*'. There were also teachers who enjoyed their higher status and thought of themselves as the authority in education. These kinds of teachers were more inclined to trigger communication problems. On the contrary, S1, S3 and S3 all pointed out that there were teachers who were friendly, modest and amiable. They tended to respect students, be careful of wording to avoid emotional hurt, and communicate with students on equal terms. S1, S2 and S3 said that they were more willing and confident to talk when they met these kinds of teachers because they would not be afraid of being severely scolded when making mistakes and they enjoyed the feeling of sharing ideas, arguing, and asking questions freely and openly.

Meanwhile, there were fewer communication problems occurring. Even when misunderstandings or problems arose, they would be immediately eliminated via communication. In addition to teachers' personalities as the perceived cause of hindering or promoting communication, S3 also indicated that '*some people (students) sometimes don't answer the questions, it's because they are introverted*'. Nevertheless, S3 did not consider students' being introverted as a factor causing communication problems. S3 further commented that since her non-native English speaker language teachers shared the same culture with the students, they were more likely to be tolerant of the introverted students and they understood the introverted students' feeling timid and awkward to answer questions. Therefore, there would not be communication problems caused by students' personalities. On the contrary, S3 believed that the native English speaker language teachers were not able to understand why the introverted Chinese students did not want to answer questions because they did not share the same culture with the students. Consequently, they might get irritated and lose temper, leading to communication problems. Different from S1, S2 and S4, although students' personalities were mentioned by S3, she attributed this to 'cultural difference' rather than 'personality' as a perceived cause of communication problems.

#### **5.1.4 What Are the Positive Impacts of Effective Teacher-student Classroom Communication on Teaching and Learning?**

The positive impacts of effective teacher-student classroom communication on teaching and learning is the last research question. The process of answering the interview questions and sharing ideas helped the participants think more deeply and clearly about the topic because the interview questions were designed in a logical sequence. With more interview questions asked, the participants were encouraged to think more and expose more details. Thus, when the last questions came, the participants talked more confidently and expressed their attitudes without hesitation. Among all the 13 participants, 12 believed teacher-student effective classroom communication had positive influences on eight aspects which all facilitated teaching and learning. By contrast, there was one native English speaker teacher participant (N1) said '*I think there is some influences, but not a strong one*', and '*better communication connect with a better performance, not always*'.

I use Figure 5.6 to present the findings and the themes generated from my interview data. To keep consistency and eliminate confusion, I use exactly the same colors and the format to illustrate the findings as in Figure 5.1 and 5.4.

## Positive Impact of Teacher-student Effective Communication on Teaching and Learning (Themes)

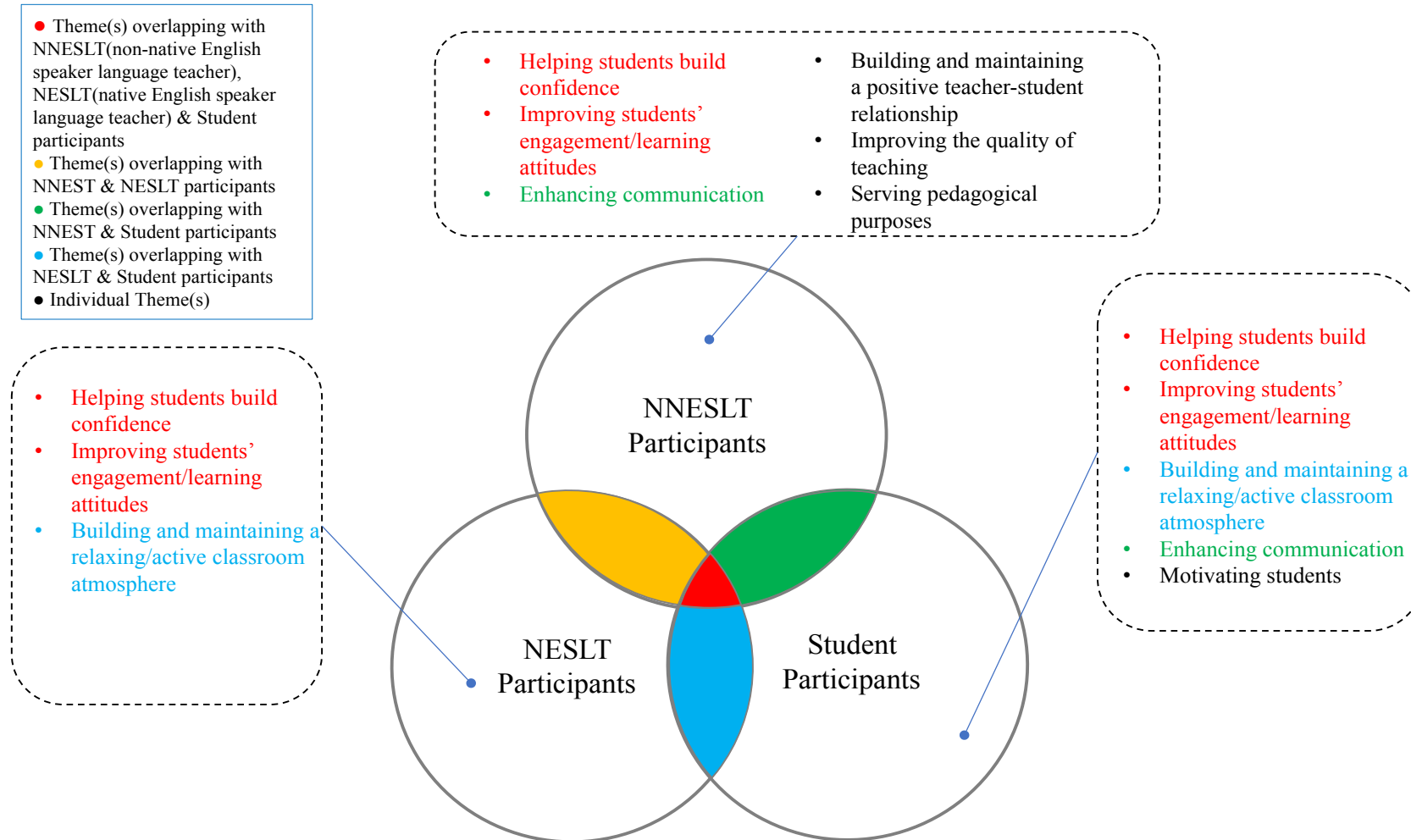


Figure 5.6 Influences of Effective Teacher-student Classroom Communication on Teaching and Learning

The eight themes listed in Figure 5.6 are perfectly consistent with the participants' answers to the first research question—the importance of classroom communication between teachers and students. All the participants believed that effective classroom communication would bring benefits since in a relaxing and friendly learning environment, with teachers and students mutually trusted, students would be more engaged and motivated while their teachers would be able to make knowledge and information more easily transmitted.

The student participant S1 believed that effective teacher-student classroom communication

*will be a kind of motivation...it's like when you are encouraged, you are happy...if the teacher of the course encourages you frequently, you will desire to learn more seriously.*

Extract from S1 data

S2 expressed the similar viewpoints and S2 indicated that he would '*gradually like it* (the course)' if teachers paid attention to the wording and avoided harsh words. Different from S1 and S2, S3 emphasized the positive impacts brought by effective teacher-student classroom communication by saying:

*Communication might be more important...it's like perhaps your teaching methods are very good, but it's meaningless if students cannot accept...if they can accept, as long as 70%, it's better than none.*

Extract from S3 data

S3's comments focused on teaching rather than learning because her major was education. Similar to S3, S4 noted that '*communication skills is quite important to a teacher in his career*'.

Compared with the student participants, the teacher participants' foci are wider. As for the non-native English speaker language teacher participant group, C1, C2 and C3 laid emphasis on building and maintaining a positive teacher-student relationship via effective classroom communication and its positive impacts on both teaching and learning. This is a key theme which will be discussed in the next chapter. C1 explained:

*If a student doesn't like the teacher...he will have a contradictory feeling...it will reduce learning efficiency by over ten percent, it might be over twenty percent, or even more because there is already a barrier...he won't think you teach well...so if we can make a student like the teacher, I think it will be helpful to some extent to teaching'.*

Extract from C1 data

C2 shared her experiences in building mutual trust with the students via effective classroom communication such as encouraging more and avoiding humiliating words. C2 said that if the positive relationship had been built,

*at least in your class, relatively she will take it more seriously, to most of the students...at least he would like to listen more or less...to me, if he is willing to listen, I feel better in class and it's more convenient to teach...I think this kind of teacher-student relationship...actually it's the same among people. If I get along with the person well, I'd like to listen what he says...although it's teacher-student relationship, in fact this is more a kind of human relationship. And the common principal of human relationship can be applied'.*

Extract from C2 data

C2's viewpoints support what has been discussed in Chapter 3 that teaching is also a social activity. The benefits effective communication can bring in society and in a classroom share the similarity in building human relationship, thus facilitating teaching and learning. C4 shared similar experiences and cited an example of how one of his poorly-performed students changed learning attitudes after he built a good relationship with him via effective communication. C3 further illustrated that effective classroom communication helped to

*psychologically build a better relationship or feelings, including love and trust...when you give him more attention, he actually gives you more attention as well...then he will pay more attention to this course.*

Extract from C3 data

C3 also believed that if a teacher communicated effectively with students, students would have the impression that '*this teacher cares a lot about the class, and he's serious, I should be serious, too*' and effective communication

*helped his mental growth...for example, communicate with them by using more encouraging words, or motivate and stimulate them.*

Extract from C3 data

The native English speaker language teacher participant group mentioned that effective communication's positive impacts on teaching and learning lay in many aspects. Firstly, according to N2, effective classroom communication helped students '*improve their confidence*'. N3 paid attention to the classroom dynamic and students' learning attitudes because he believed:

*You don't want to be rude to your students. That doesn't help the classroom dynamic. If you have a teacher like, you enjoy the class. And then you engage more, you learn the material better and you spend more time with that subject. That will help you overall so much in learning that subject.*

Extract from N3 data

Supporting N3's viewpoint, N5 commented that effective classroom communication meant:

*Encouraging them when they do well...disciplining them when they are not so well, especially with regards to language learning, it's mainly what you say in the classroom is encouraging a lot rather than inputting fact directly...and it helps to stimulate students' interest in learning so that they do more reading out of the classroom.*

Extract from N5 data

However, as discussed, although N1 acknowledged the importance of teacher-student classroom communication, he did not believe it would have a strong influence on teaching or learning because '*better communication to the extent it does for those do want to learn*'. From N1's perspective, effective communication would have positive influences on the students who wanted to learn to some extent. However, he did not believe effective communication might have a strong influence on the students who did not want to learn.

In summary, according to the participants, the positive influences of effective teacher-student classroom communication not only lie in pedagogical purposes such as improving the quality of teaching, transmitting knowledge, and giving instructions but also lie in psychological purposes such as building and maintaining a relaxing and active classroom atmosphere, building and maintaining a positive teacher-student relationship so as to motivate students, stimulate students' engagement and learning interest, and help them build confidence. Meanwhile, in the process of teaching and learning, communication is enhanced. As discussed, it is a positive cycle.

### **A Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter presents the findings and offers some interpretation of the participants' meanings according to the sequence of the research questions. The data indicated that effective teacher-student classroom communication has a positive impact on both teaching and learning. It functions as both a tool and a target learning object, helping teachers and students to build and maintain a positive teacher-student relationship and a relaxing and active classroom atmosphere, which facilitates the improvement of teaching quality and students' engagement and learning motivation. In Chapter 6, I move on to discuss the findings, which then leads to the development and refinement of my original conceptual framework.

## Chapter 6 Discussion

In Chapter 5, I have presented what I have found from my research data. In this chapter, I move on to discuss, synthesize and theorize the findings, and refer back to what have been learned from the literature to examine the degree to which my findings support or challenge current knowledge in this field. Following is a critical review of the original conceptual framework presented in Chapter 2. I then present a revised conceptual framework based on the theorization and my new understandings of this researched field. I end this chapter with discussion of the limitations of the study and possibilities of further study.

### 6.1 A Synthesis and Theorization of My Findings

From the findings reported in Chapter 5, all 13 participants confirmed their belief in the importance of teacher-student classroom communication and the positive influences effective communication had on teaching and learning. In this section, I discuss and synthesize the findings in order to develop a theory about the importance of teacher-student classroom communication and the positive impacts it might have on teaching and learning. The discussion will be based on the sequence of the research questions so that it is logical and explicit to understand what I have learned. In Chapter 7, I propose how this new learning extends understandings in the field and practice.

#### *The importance of effective teacher-student classroom communication*

In Chapter 2, I explored and conceptualized the importance of teacher-student classroom communication, and teachers' effective communication with students. I am now developing a theory about the importance of effective teacher-student classroom communication based on my research and my re-assessment of the literature.

The importance of teacher-student classroom communication is multi-faceted. The participants offered three interlinked layers of explanation for the importance of teacher-student classroom communication which underpin the theory proposed here. The first layer concerns the fundamental function of teacher-student classroom communication. My interpretation of my data leads me to suggest that teacher-student classroom communication is the core of language teaching and learning because English language is not only a tool to transmit knowledge but also a target subject for students to learn. On one hand, through verbal communication in class, students practice and use the language, which is the essence of



language classes. On the other hand, classroom communication helps teachers transmit knowledge, give instructions, explain difficult points, answer students' questions and assign tasks clearly so that it helps the knowledge and teaching content better received by students. This accords with the argument put forward by Walsh (2015), Kuzu (2003), and Fashiku (2017), which is supported by the interpretation of my data by indicating that the importance of speech communication in language classes is complex for it is both a tool to fulfil academic activities and a teaching and learning object. The first layer illuminates that the importance of teacher-student classroom communication refers to its pedagogical functions.

The second layer uncovers the underlying importance of teacher-student classroom communication, which refers to psychological concerns such as people's emotions and feelings. Via teacher-student classroom communication, a relaxing and active classroom atmosphere is created, and mutual trust can be built between teachers and students, which helps to motivate students through emotionally stimulating students' learning attitudes, interest and engagement. This aligns with what I have learned from the literature in Chapter 2 when discussing the benefits brought by effective teacher-student classroom communication. In addition to the pedagogical functions, satisfying teachers' and students' psychological needs which is beneficial to teaching and learning is regarded as the importance of teacher-student classroom communication as well.

The third layer indicates a broader perspective. Communication is always considered as the 'lifeblood' (Dhillon & Kaur, 2021:2) of organizations including schools (Bucata & Rizescu, 2017; Lovlyn, 2017). Aligned with the discussion in Chapter 2, communication is inevitable in the social world. Teaching and learning is one kind of social activity. Similar to any social activity, teaching and learning cannot happen without the context of communication (Ubong & Okpor, 2018). It is the core of teaching and learning (Shockley, 1982; Levy, Wubbels & Brekelmans, 1992; Polk, 2006).

In addition to the importance of teacher-student classroom communication, the data has also illuminated the fact that only when the communication between teachers and students is 'effective' can it be beneficial to teaching and learning. This supports Fashiku (2017)'s argument that being effective helps to make sure the messages and information is successfully conveyed, received, interpreted, and understood. My interpretation of the data leads me to theorize that effective classroom communication between teachers and students should serve both the functional (pedagogical) and psychological purposes well so that it has positive influences on both teaching and learning. These two concepts (functional and psychological

purposes of classroom communication) have also been referred to as ‘content related’ and ‘non-content related’ classroom communication in this research, which was discussed in Chapter 1. The functional roles of effective classroom communication mean the satisfaction of educational aims such as knowledge transmission, giving instructions, assigning tasks, questioning, etc. The psychological roles of effective classroom communication refer to the enhancement of teacher-student relationship, building and maintaining a relaxing classroom atmosphere, etc. Both of the two roles teacher-student communication plays in class are indispensable and significant, which has been verified by the participants. However, challenging what has been discussed in Chapter 2 which emphasizes teachers’ communication skills as the elements of promoting effective classroom communication (Polk, 2006; Salami, 2009; Fashiku, 2017), I argue that my data indicates that in order to communicate effectively in class, both teachers and students should make endeavor and avoid subjective and objective factors hindering classroom communication. Influenced by my identity as a teacher, I have also been emphasizing teachers’ responsibility for effective classroom communication while ignoring the fact that students are involved in and indispensable participants of classroom communication. This is why it is called ‘teacher-student’ classroom communication. As discussed in Chapter 2, classroom communication between teachers and students might be two-way or one-way. Both teachers and students are factors either promoting or hindering classroom communication. In order to make classroom communication effective, both teachers and students should take their responsibility. In other words, when classroom communication is ineffective, teachers are not the only side to be blamed. On the contrary, both sides might be the causes leading to communication problems, and this will be discussed in the following section.

In summary, the importance of teacher-student classroom communication can never be underestimated since it prompts the attainment of different educational purposes (Fashiku, 2017) which was discussed in Chapter 2. I propose that the importance of effective teacher-student classroom communication can be explained through the following theory. In English as a foreign language classes, teacher-student classroom communication is both a target learning object and an important medium and tool to serve both functional and psychological purposes whilst effective teacher-student classroom communication has positive influences on teaching and learning. This theory supports Ubong and Lkpor (2018) who believe teaching cannot happen without communication, Kuzu (2003) who considers classroom communication as a medium and approach of information sharing, and Fashiku (2017) who

puts forward the two important roles of teacher-student classroom communication. However, this theory challenges the literature that emphasizes teachers' responsibility for effective communication (Salami, 2009; Fashiku, 2017). Moreover, this theory also challenges my previous understandings and the critiques on the emphasis of transmitting knowledge as the importance of teacher-student classroom communication. Based on the analysis of my data, transmitting knowledge should be understood as one important role teacher-student classroom plays since it might directly influence teaching and learning. In conclusion, two important points arise from my data. Firstly, some aspects of the importance of teacher-student classroom communication are universal. However, the second point is that there are some unique influences of teacher-student classroom communication in EFL classes in the Chinese context.

*Differences of native and non-native English speaker language teachers in terms of their practices of classroom communication*

As emphasized, there are different cultures and languages involved in the context of this research. It is not unexpected that the findings of the research indicate that the teachers coming from different cultures do communicate differently with students because they are influenced by different contexts such as cultures, beliefs, and languages. Therefore, native English speaker language teachers generally speak faster, talk in a more causal way, and they tend to use proverbs and body language to explain difficult points. This accords with the work of Wang and Fang (2020). The interpretation of the data allows me to develop new understanding that native English speaker language teachers pay more attention to emotional connection with students because they believe a good rapport facilitates teaching and learning whilst non-native English speaker language teachers focus more on transmitting knowledge. Consistent with the discussion in Chapter 2, the difference may be explained that affected by Confucianism, for one thing, power distance exists between teachers and students. The hierarchical relationship leads to the fact that emotional connection is not emphasized because the dynamic in a Chinese classroom is different. It is a common rule that students are obedient and respectful to teachers and teachers are regarded as authority. Under this circumstance, emotional connection is not so emphasized as that in western countries because the classroom dynamic appears to be settled. For another thing, non-native English language teachers acknowledge their teacher identity as a knowledge transmitter, which supports Huang's work (2018). As argued in the literature, non-native English speaker language teachers and their

students believed in hard work and lay emphasis on academic achievements. As a result, transmitting and acquiring knowledge is the most important thing in class. These factors result in their focusing more on pedagogical purposes than emotional connections with students through communication in class.

However, the analysis of the data leads me to suggest that the differences of native and non-native English speaker language teachers in terms of how these two groups of teachers communicate with their students in class do not indicate that they are the perceived causes hindering teacher-student classroom communication. The interpretation of the data adds to new knowledge that the differences do not indicate which group of teachers communicate more effectively with their students and the emphasis on one role of teacher-student classroom communication does not facilitate effective communication. Instead, as theorized in the above section, both functional and psychological roles of teacher-student classroom communication are important and effective teacher-student classroom communication should serve both these two purposes so as to positively influence teaching and learning. From my participants' perspective, native English speaker language teachers' talking in a more casual way, being more polite, paying more attention to emotional connections and encouraging frequently can help better serve psychological purposes of classroom communication, which facilitates effective communication in class and this supports Moussu and Llurda's work (2008). Non-native English speaker language teachers' being more sensitive to students' learning difficulties, and their shared cultures and languages are also elements promoting effective communication between teachers and students in class since it helps to better serve functional purposes of communication, which accords with Medgyes' (1994) argument. Drawing upon the interpretations of my data and the literature, I contend that although native and non-native English speaker language teachers have different emphasis on classroom communication and different communication styles, both of them have advantages and disadvantages concerning effective classroom communication. In such a complex context, the common principles of teacher-student classroom communication can still be applicable. Different cultures and languages might not be the only cause of communication problems. On the contrary, as discussed above, they might be an advantage to promote effective classroom communication. Similarly, although non-native English speaker language teachers share the same cultures and languages with their students, communication problems might arise as well. This will be further discussed in the following section.

To conclude, I propose the emphasis on the roles of teacher-student classroom communication and the communication styles as the key differences between native and non-native English speaker language teachers in terms of their practices of classroom communication. Influenced by different contexts, native English speaker language teachers put more emphasis on psychological roles of classroom communication whilst non-native English speaker language teachers emphasize more on the functional roles of classroom communication. These differences indicate factors hindering and promoting effective teacher-student communication, which provide insights of potential implications for practice to be discussed in Chapter 7.

#### *The perceived causes and negative impacts of classroom communication problems*

Contradictory to my previous assumption and what was learned from the literature that native English speaker language teachers might have more communication problems with the students since they did not share the same culture and language (Littlewood, 2011; Koch & Takashima, 2021; Taşdemir & Gürbüz, 2021), the findings help me develop new understandings. My interpretation of my data leads me to theorize that the factors hindering effective classroom communication are complicated and various ranging from subjective causes such as the communicators and contextual ones such as cultural differences.

Based on the research results, culture and language are two perceived causes leading to communication problems. As discussed in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, this research was conducted in the macro context of China, and the micro context is the EFL classes of the private university I work within. In Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, I have stated that teacher-student classroom communication is influenced by the Chinese context, especially Confucianism. I propose the following factors to be the causes of teacher-student classroom communication problems— ‘cultural difference’, ‘power distance’, ‘teacher identity’, ‘political standpoint’, ‘educational belief’, and ‘focus of teaching’. They can all be incorporated into contextual factors causing communication problems between both native and non-native English speaker teachers and their students. Aligned with God and Zhang’s (2019) argument, cultural differences and different political standpoints in intercultural communication often lead to misunderstandings or conflicts because the sent or received information is influenced by different cultural communities. In addition, influenced by different contexts, teachers’ ‘and students’ educational beliefs, and the focus of teaching are different as well. Moreover, the existence of power distance, and non-native English teachers’ identifying themselves as

knowledge transmitters are influenced by the philosophy of Confucianism. I therefore categorize all the above factors into contextual factors causing teacher-student classroom communication problems.

However, my interpretation of the data adds new insights. I argue that the communication problems caused by cultural differences do not only lie in the differences since both native English speaker language teachers and their non-native English speaker students are aware of the fact that they have different cultures. Instead, my data suggests that the communication problems are caused by the neglect of the fact that non-native English speaker students are accustomed to communicating in a Chinese way such as being called by names to answer questions while native English speaker language teachers try to communicate with the students in their own way. Drawing upon my data, the native English speaker language teachers might get unhappy or irritated when there is no feedback from the students because this is considered as being impolite and absent-minded in class. However, the students are not accustomed to giving feedback, answering questions, or interrupting without being called by names. Both of the parties do not realize that influenced by different contexts, they communicate differently. My data suggests that even when the native English speaker language teachers and their students realize the differences, it is not easy for both parties to make adjustment to different classroom communication styles. Being polite and tolerant, and learning intercultural communication skills were suggested in my data so that adjustment can be brought about.

By contrast, for the non-native English speaker language teachers who share the same culture and language with the students, as discussed in Chapter 2, influenced by Confucianism which emphasizes on hierarchical status, teachers enjoy a higher status than students. Their communication is therefore not on equal terms, leading to communication problems. Based on the results, teachers' attitudes towards hierarchical relationship rather than the hierarchical relationship itself is the root of communication problems. My data suggests that there are teachers who are arrogant because they enjoy a higher status and they don't think they should pay attention to the wording. Under the circumstances, communication problems are more likely to occur. Furthermore, as mentioned in Chapter 2, the emphasis on hierarchical status positions teachers as superior to students. Such kind of classroom communication is limited to academic activities. Hence, the communication to satisfy psychological needs such as words showing concerns and care is neglected. The data enables me to develop new understanding that this kind of classroom communication focuses more on functional purposes and this is

where the problem lies in. As theorized in the above section, effective teacher-student classroom communication should best serve both functional and psychological purposes. Any neglect of either of these purposes might hinder effective teacher-student classroom communication. Additionally, from the analysis of my data, non-native English language teachers focus more on teaching content, believe in hard work and learning-by-rote, and lay emphasis on academic achievements, which causes their over-emphasis on classroom communication as a tool of transmitting knowledge while neglecting the psychological functions of classroom communication and this is consistent with what Jin and Cortazzi (2011) claim. I attribute it to a contextual factor resulting in communication problems because these beliefs are influenced by the teachings of Confucianism in a Chinese context.

In addition to the contextual factors, the data contributes to new knowledge that there are also other causes of classroom communication problems between teachers and students. Factors such as the understandings of classroom communication, teachers' and students' personalities, students' English proficiency, and generation gap should all be taken into consideration since they might lead to communication problems and misunderstandings. When this happens, the classroom atmosphere and the relationship between teachers and students might be tense or hostile, which is negative to teaching and learning. Students might lose interest and motivation in learning, leading to them being less engaged in class. Furthermore, based on my interpretation of the data, students would be emotionally unsatisfied as well—hurt, unhappy, frustrated, angry, disappointed and unhappy. Aligned with what has been learned from Chen, Zhang, Chan, Michaels, Resnick and Huang (2020), the participants admitted that the negative emotional impact affected their enthusiasm to communicate, thus affecting the quality of teaching and engagement of learning. In addition, since this research was conducted in the context of EFL classes in a private university in China, aligned with the discussion in Chapter 2, students' low English proficiency is also an element hindering teacher-student classroom communication. However, my data suggests that as non-native English speaker language teachers can speak Chinese when students do not understand English, students' English proficiency is not a main cause resulting in communication problems to this group of English language teachers.

To summarize, I suggest that the perceived causes of teacher-student classroom communication problems can be explained through the following theory. Both contextual factors and subjective factors concerning the communicators can result in communication problems. Since this research was conducted in the context of EFL classes in China, the

contextual factors are unavoidable causes of classroom communication problems whilst subjective factors which can be applied in a broader scope can cause classroom communication problems as well. However, things can be done to mitigate against the contextual factors, which will be discussed in Chapter 7.

### *The positive impacts of effective teacher-student classroom communication on teaching and learning*

The third element of my developing theory concerns the proposition that positive impacts of effective teacher-student classroom communication on teaching and learning are interconnected and weave with each other.

As one of the most important themes emerging from my data, teacher-student relationship has been mentioned most frequently both in my data and in the literature because teacher-student relationship is directly or indirectly linked to student learning (Frisby & Martin, 2010; Frymier & Houser, 2000; Martin & Dowson, 2009). Consistent with my learning from Bean and Eaton (2001), Coupland (2003), Faranda and Clarke (2004), I propose the theory that when there is a mutual-friendly and trusting bond between teachers and students, a personal connection can be built so that there will be mutual attention, understanding, respect, and enjoyable interactions in class. This influences students' attitudes, engagement and behaviors in the classroom (Katz, Kaplan & Gueta, 2009). From the analysis of my data, I have developed new understanding that the common principal of human relationships can be applied to teacher-student relationship as well. When there is a negative relationship between teachers and students, students' learning efficiency might decrease. On the contrary, consistent with the argument put forward by Christophel (1990), Frymier (1990) and Mazer (2012), when the students' emotional arousal is stimulated, the greater emotional interest and motivation in learning can be aroused. Students felt more willing to cooperate in class and communicate with teachers, and students had more interest in the course when they had a positive relationship with their teachers. This is why a positive teacher-student relationship can be helpful to improve students' learning attitudes, interest and engagement. By communicating effectively in class, a positive relationship can be built and maintained. Moreover, a positive teacher-student relationship contributes to creating a positive classroom atmosphere. My data supports the conclusions reached by Agustina and Setiawan (2020) that a comfortable, active, and relaxing learning environment is one of the most effective and powerful tools to encourage learning and facilitate teaching. For one thing, in an enjoyable environment, students feel less



stressed, safer and happier (Black, 2005). My data adds to new knowledge that not only students, but teachers as well feel more relaxed and less stressed in a positive classroom atmosphere, which positively influence their teaching. And this concerns the psychological purposes of teacher-student classroom communication. I am also proposing that when effective teacher-student classroom communication serve the psychological purposes of students, teachers' psychological needs can also be satisfied. For another thing, my data suggests that a relaxing and active atmosphere makes it easier to motivate students (Sedden & Clark, 2016) because the relaxing and active classroom communication between teachers and students is highly related to cultivating students' motivation (Harada, 2017). With motivation and enthusiasm, students will be more engaged and participate more actively in learning activities such as answering questions, expressing attitudes, sharing ideas, discussing topics, and completing tasks. This view supports the work of Bomia, Beluzo, Demeester, Elander, Johnson and Sheldon (1997), and Chapman (2003). As discussed in Chapter 5, students might be less afraid of making mistakes and being severely criticized, leading to their willingness to talk and give feedback. Thus, teachers might know whether the students are able to catch up and understand what has been taught. Meanwhile, consistent with what Fredrick, Blumenfeld and Paris (2004), and He (2013) propose, engaged students are more dedicated, attentive and active in class, and they have high motivations and academic goals, which is critical to their learning performance. Effective communication helps to build and maintain a positive teacher-student relationship and create a positive classroom atmosphere, which is viewed as being '*at the heart of classroom environment*' (Polk, 2006: 25). In a positive classroom environment, students will be more emotionally supportive. The research findings have confirmed the views put forward by Woolley, Kol, & Bowen (2009), and Shan, Li, Shi & Wang (2014) that students who are highly emotionally supportive display greater interest, confidence, enjoyment and engagement in learning. My data adds that in a relaxing environment, both teachers and students feel more comfortable and they will be more willing to communicate with each other, which eventually promotes the communication between teachers and students.

In summary, the positive impacts of effective teacher-student classroom communication on teaching and learning can be theorized through looking at two purposes of classroom communication. Firstly, effective teacher-student classroom communication facilitates better transmission of knowledge and completion of teaching tasks when teachers are able to explain content clearly, give clear instructions and help students solve problems. Secondly, effective teacher-student classroom communication helps to satisfy both teachers' and students'

psychological needs so that both teachers and students feel relaxed, safe and comfortable and emotionally connected. Challenging what has been discussed in Chapter 2 which focuses on the positive impacts effective teacher-student classroom communication on learning, it helps me develop new understanding that as discussed above, it is also beneficial to teaching in the theorized two aspects. On one hand, teachers can effectively transmit knowledge and complete teaching tasks. On the other hand, teachers' psychological needs can also be satisfied when they have a positive relationship with their students and teach in a positive environment.

My findings and the theorization have led me to reconsider my original conceptual framework. I therefore present a revised version in the next section, which takes account of my learning through this research.

## **6.2 Revisiting the Original Conceptual Framework**

In Chapter 2, I presented the conceptual framework developed through relevant literature and my understandings of the importance of teacher-student classroom communication. As demonstrated in Figure 2.3, Chapter 2, the original conceptual framework explains how the various factors I have proposed as influential on classroom communication are linked and what has to happen to make classroom communication effective and what hinders it being effective. It was designed as a guide to my empirical work. However, during the process of analyzing the data and synthesizing the findings, I have developed new understandings of the researched area. In addition, since I have proposed new theories, the conceptual framework should be revised to summarize the new theories.

Firstly, the research has been conducted in the context of China, which has not been noted in the original conceptual framework. The research findings indicate that cultural differences could be seen to account for variations in teacher-student classroom communication. According to the participants, the Chinese culture and Confucianism have an impact on the educational field, people's cultural and educational beliefs. This eventually influences how teachers and students communicate in class in China. Non-native English speaker language teachers focus more on pedagogical functions of classroom communication. This aligns with what have been learned from the literature. However, the shared cultures and languages between teachers and students are helpful to effective classroom communication. There are both positive and negative influences on teacher-student classroom communication. Therefore, in the refined conceptual framework shown in Figure 6.1, China, Chinese culture and Confucianism are added into the outward circle. From the analysis of my data, teachers'

and students' cultural beliefs, and the educational aims, beliefs, systems are influenced by the macro context. Hence, they are placed in the second layer. The research topic teacher-student classroom communication remains in the third layer, indicating that although it is one small aspect of the field, it is the core and it is of great importance. I keep the two-way arrows to indicate that these three circles have mutual influences on each other. I use different colors to demonstrate two points. On one hand, the different colors indicate three different layers discussed above. On the other hand, I use different colors to distinguish the revised conceptual framework from the original one.

Secondly, two important roles of effective teacher-student classroom communication were not included in the original conceptual framework. Drawing upon the findings, as discussed, functional (pedagogical) purposes and psychological purposes are two core functions of teacher-student classroom communication. They reflect the importance of teacher-student communication and the positive influences it can bring to teaching and learning. From the analysis of my data, the importance of teacher-student classroom communication should not be limited to academic activities such as transmitting knowledge, giving instructions, asking and answering questions. Both teachers' and students' psychological needs should also be satisfied through effective classroom communication. When classroom communication serves both the functional (pedagogical) and psychological purposes well, it might facilitate 'effective' classroom communication, which can bring positive influences to teaching and learning. These two elements demonstrate the important findings of the research. Hence, I decided to incorporate these two core elements into the revised conceptual framework. There are overlapping parts within these two yellow circles, which indicates that the functional and psychological purposes of teacher-student classroom communication are not totally separated but to some extent interconnected instead. There are occasions that it is hard and unnecessary to decide whether teachers and students are communicating for knowledge or building rapport because these two functions of classroom communication are sometimes interwoven. Therefore, the two yellow circles are designed to overlap so as to indicate the subtle relationship.

In addition, when reviewing the findings and the original conceptual framework, the complicated connections and relationships of the layers have been examined. Therefore, the conceptual framework has been modified and refined as Figure 6.1 presents.

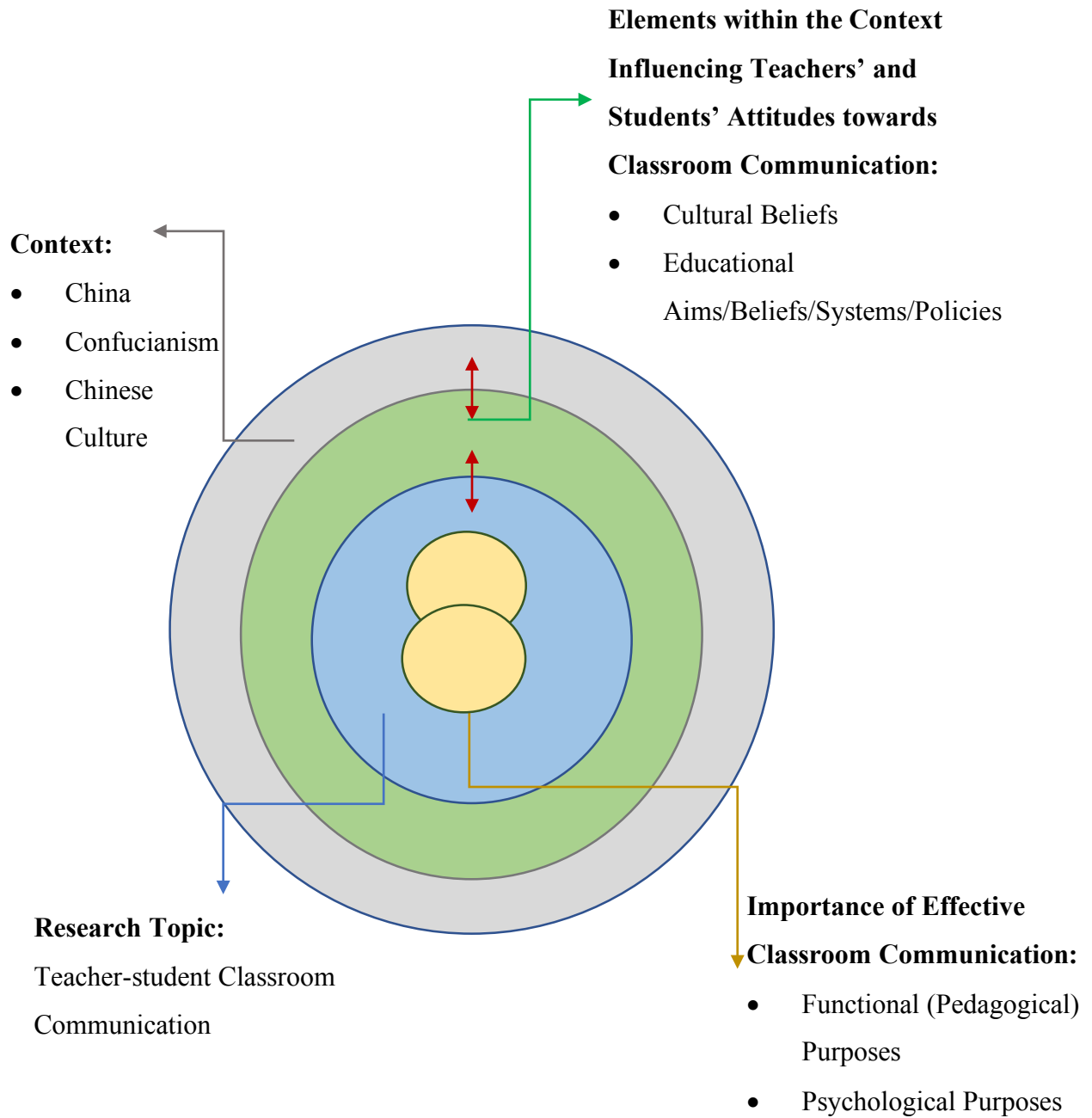


Figure 6.1 *A Modified and Refined Conceptual Framework*

This reorganized and refined conceptual framework derives from the original one, with the findings and my ongoing understandings of the issues incorporated.

The biggest circle in grey indicates the contexts in which the research was conducted. The elements in the green layer are influenced by the context of China, Confucianism and Chinese culture. Meanwhile, they influence the core blue layer—teacher-student classroom

communication in China illustrated as the blue layer. The changes in the attitudes and practices of classroom communication might also reversely influence teachers' educational beliefs, educational policies, thus leading to a change of the macro context. This explains the two-way arrows.

I include two yellow circles to further indicate the important roles of teacher-student classroom communication. These two circles are within the researched area concerning classroom communication and they are important elements because my research aim is to explore the importance of teacher-student classroom communication. I now use this refined conceptual framework to summarize the theories. However, this refined conceptual framework illustrates ideas and concepts in a broad way. In order to further demonstrate the relationships of ideas and refer back to my research topic, I designed another focused framework illustrating how the importance of effective teaching and learning can be understood.

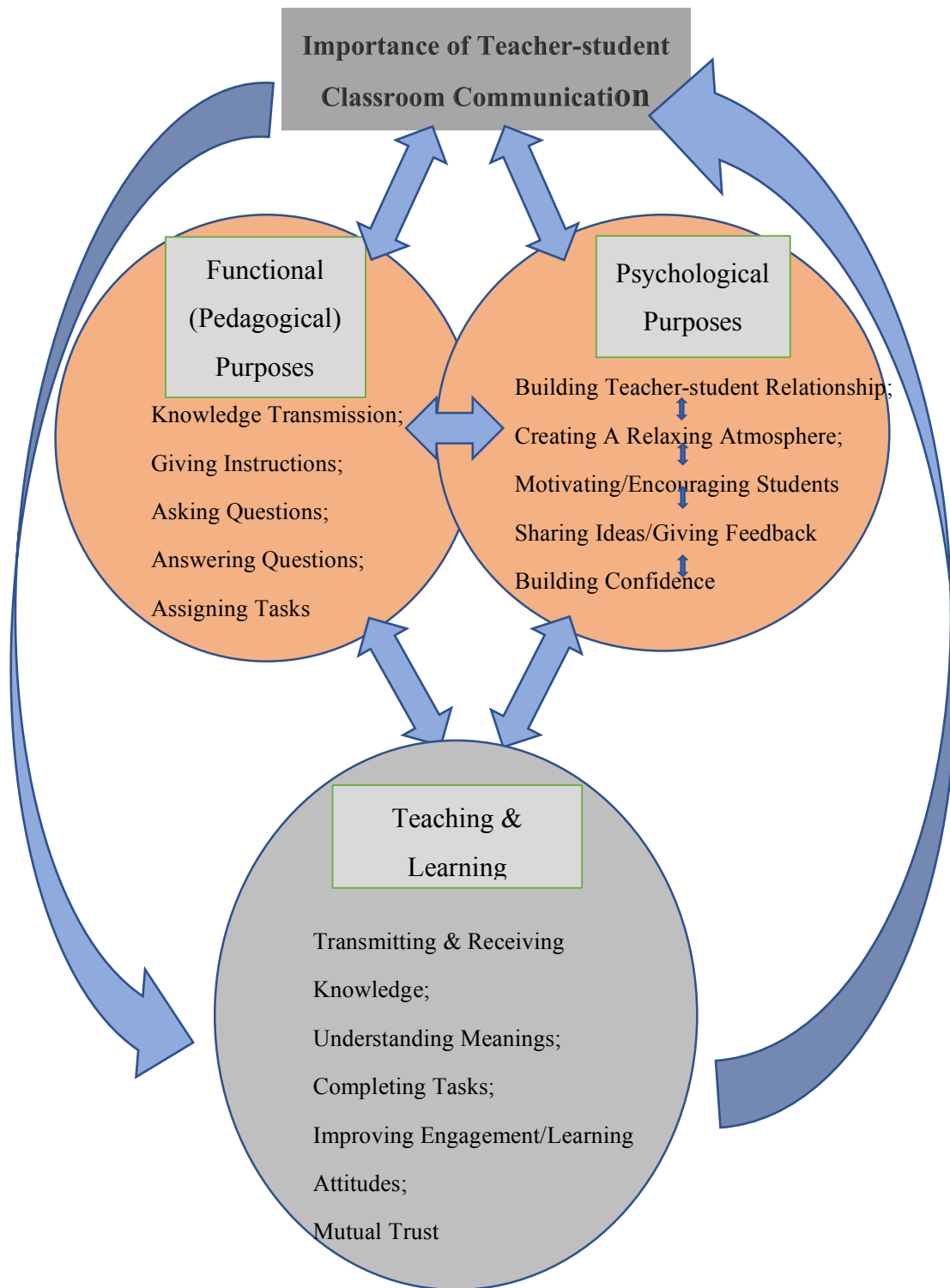


Figure 6.2 the Importance of Teacher-student Classroom Communication and its Positive Influences on Teaching and Learning

Different from Figure 6.1, Figure 6.2 focuses on the core research area and echoes with my fundamental research questions and aims. It presents a specific conclusion of the

importance of teacher-student classroom communication, its positive influences on teaching and learning, and the complex relationships of the ideas and concepts.

Drawing from the discussion of the findings, the fundamental role of classroom communication is to accomplish teaching tasks including transmitting knowledge, assigning tasks, giving instructions, asking questions, answering questions and solving academic problems. The findings also indicate that the roles of classroom communication are not limited to educational purposes but more emotional and psychological satisfaction, which should not be neglected. Although psychological satisfaction does not aim at serving the pedagogical purposes such as transmitting knowledge, the emotional supports facilitate a better accomplishment of teaching and learning, and strongly affects students' academic performance and achievements, which is of great value as well (Dhillon & Kaur, 2021). Referring back to Chapter 2, drawing upon the literature, the aims of education are not limited to transmitting knowledge, but range widely from all aspects such as helping students cultivate skills, develop critical thinking ability, make judgements, cultivate qualities and characters, achieve personal success and make contribution to the world. As discussed, effective teacher-student classroom communication should best serve both these two purposes and then it positively influences teaching and learning. Effective teacher-student classroom communication helps teachers to complete teaching tasks and motivate students whilst it also helps students to be more engaged in class. These ideas and the relationship between them are demonstrated in Figure 6.2.

In addition, those two-way arrows indicate the tightly interwoven and correlated relationships and how they interact. Effective teacher-student classroom communication can never be absent from ensuring and improving the quality of teaching and learning. In the meantime, positive teaching and learning prompts effective communication between teachers and students. This loop creates a virtuous circle.

In conclusion, I use Figure 6.1 as the revised conceptual framework to summarize the theories and the research findings. I use Figure 6.2 to further explain my researched area, the ideas, and the relationships between them.

In the next section, I move on to discuss the limitations of the research and possibilities of further study.

### **6.3 Limitations of the Study and Possibilities for Further Study**

When referring back on the research process, and the decisions and choices I made, there are inevitable limitations due to various reasons. There are regrets as well because there might always be other possibilities if I had made different decisions and choices, thus resulting in different ways and experiences of doing the research. The discussion of the limitations concerns the nature of the sampling and the potential personal positions and biases that might influence the research. Following the limitations, the possibilities of further study in this research area will be discussed as well.

#### **6.3.1 Limitations of the Study**

The main limitation of the research concerns the nature of the sampling. As discussed, the teacher participants I had selected were all English language teachers and the student participants were all those who I was teaching from EFL classes at the time the research was conducted. The choice of the sampling is limited to the English language subject. The scope of the choices of the sampling could be expanded to other subjects such as mathematics, physics, economics, etc. It would also be interesting to see if what I discovered could be reflected in other subjects. In addition to the diversity of subjects, although there were three different groups of participants that enabled me to hear different voices from different angles, I would like to hear from more voices from school leaders and administrators, and parents so that the perspectives could be wider. In addition, the participants were selected from the private university I work within. I also consider this as one limitation of the research because I did not get access to more voices from public universities or other private universities. I therefore could not see what happened in other universities in terms of teacher-student classroom communication or make a comparison with what I discovered.

Secondly, in the research process, although I drew from the literature and took a reflexive approach to reduce the influences on the research brought by my personal biases and positions, the influences could not be completely avoided. This will be further discussed in Chapter 7 when I reflect on how my identities and my personal positions influence the way I conducted the research and the research process. Although I accept that the influences cannot be absolutely eliminated, I still consider it as another limitation of the research.



### **6.3.2 Possibilities for Further Study**

During the research process, I have developed new understandings of this field. I therefore propose possibilities for further studies in this field.

Firstly, as discussed in Chapter 3, I had tried interview, observation and questionnaire as pilot studies. However, as observation and questionnaire did not fit well into the research purposes, I eventually decided to adopt interview as the research method. In qualitative researches, there is no right or wrong method. Although observation and questionnaire had been considered as being not suitable to this particular research, it does not indicate there is no possibility or feasibility of adopting these two methods in further study in the future. I might combine interview with other research methods to enlarge the sampling size and collect diverse data in any further study. Moreover, during the Covid-19 pandemic when face-to-face contact was not allowed, I tried online interviews, which were regarded as advantageous by the student participants because they felt comfortable and accustomed to talking online. Although my participants did not choose to be interviewed online, the strengths of online interviews had been acknowledged in the pilot studies. I contend that in further studies, online interviews might be a worthwhile choice.

Secondly, this study focuses on ‘what’ including what is the importance of teacher-student classroom communication, what are the differences between native and non-native English speaker language teachers in terms of their practices of communication, what are the perceived causes of communication problems, what are the negative influences of communication problems, and what are the positive influences of effective classroom communication. The ways facilitating effective communication in class and communication skills haven’t been explored. Therefore, in further studies, the focus can be transferred to ‘how’—how to conduct effective classroom communication. In addition, non-verbal communication, which is another important and indispensable element of communication has not been explored in this study. Non-verbal communication between teachers and students is an interesting and significant topic as well. Attention can be paid to this field in further studies.

### **A Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter discusses the findings of the study and draws a conclusion that influenced by Confucianism and the Chinese contexts, the pedagogical functions of teacher-student classroom communication are over-emphasized while the psychological functions are less valued. However, both pedagogical and psychological functions of teacher-student classroom

communication are important. It is significant to be aware of the importance of effective teacher-student classroom communication and the positive influences it might bring to both teaching and learning. I have also proposed that contextual factors and subjective factors might cause communication problems which should be avoided in practice. In addition, the research findings are synthesized and theorized based on my interpretation and new understandings of the researched area, which leads to the potential implications for practices discussed in Chapter 7. This chapter also presents a revised conceptual framework based on the results of the study and my new understandings developed in the research process, illustrates the limitations of the research, and proposes possibilities for further studies. In the next chapter, I move on to discuss the contribution of the research to knowledge and practice, and put forward potential implications for teachers, students, educational authorities and school leaders. I then make final reflections of the entire research process.

## **Chapter 7 Conclusions**

In Chapter 6, the importance of teacher-student classroom communication and the positive impacts it might bring to teaching and learning have been synthesized and theorized. In this chapter, I start with the discussion of the contribution of the research to knowledge. I then move on to propose the potential implications for better practice in the educational area. At the end of this chapter, I make final reflections on what influences I have made on the research as my identities being both an insider and an outsider, and how the research is influential on me.

### **7.1 The Contribution of the Research to Knowledge**

The main aim of this research is to explore the importance of classroom communication between teachers and students. I intended to develop teachers' and educators' understandings of this research area and add to the awareness of the positive impacts effective teacher-student classroom communication might bring to teaching and learning, and the perceived causes and consequences of communication problems.

I now have a research basis which both supports and challenges my initial beliefs about the importance of effective teacher-student classroom communication. This study enables me to hear different voices, view this issue from various perspectives, and probe deeper into the research area so that my understandings of the topic further develop. The participants' stories and experiences themselves are a significant contribution to both the research and knowledge because the in-depth details and descriptions reveal what has happened in class and the results of the study are all based on what the participants shared in the interviews. Through the participants' voices, the importance of teacher-student classroom communication has been confirmed and presented, which potentially adds to the credibility of the research findings. As discussed in Chapter 6, there is also new knowledge contributed to this area and I have developed new understandings.

Firstly, my research demonstrates that classroom communication between teachers and students is of great importance for it is an essential tool and medium playing both functional (pedagogical) and psychological roles in serving pedagogical purposes and satisfying emotional needs. This adds to knowledge as previously it was believed that the emphasis of the functional role of teacher-student classroom communication should be criticized. I have demonstrated that the problem does not lie in the emphasis but in the over-emphasis of the

functional role of teacher-student classroom communication leading to the neglect of its psychological role. In the Chinese context, the pedagogical purpose of teacher-student classroom communication is emphasized by non-native English language speaker teachers, which has been confirmed by the participants. Meanwhile, as the core of teaching and learning, the importance of pedagogical purpose of classroom communication such as knowledge transmission has also been acknowledged. As discussed in Chapter 2, teaching and acquiring knowledge is one of the fundamental educational aims. Therefore, the emphasis of the pedagogical purpose should not be criticized because one of the roles effective classroom communication plays is to facilitate knowledge transmission. Contradictory to my previous beliefs, teachers and students are accustomed to the classroom communication style influenced by Confucianism and Chinese culture, which is not a problem. Instead, the problem is the neglect of psychological needs of both teachers and students. The psychological purpose of classroom communication facilitates the fulfilment of academic activities. Either of these two purposes cannot be sacrificed for any reason because they represent the importance and the essence of teacher-student classroom communication. This is one of the most important contributions of this research to knowledge and this leads to the potential implications for educational practices, which will be discussed in the following section.

Secondly, as discussed in Chapter 1, considering the micro context of EFL classes in this study, I compared the classroom communication between native and non-native English speaker language teachers with their students. The contrast between native and non-native English speaker language teachers concerning their practices of classroom communication made by the participants has uncovered the contextual factors affecting classroom communication. It is indicated that the classroom communication between teachers and students are influenced by the contexts including cultures, educational beliefs, etc. This is a clear contribution to knowledge as this has not been studied previously in a Chinese context. However, different contexts are not the main causes of classroom communication problems. Based on the findings, subjective factors such as teachers' and students' personalities, generation gap, and language proficiency are revealed as the perceived causes of communication problems as well. The contrast also contributes to knowledge that cultural differences do not indicate more communication problems while the neglect of the existence of cultural differences is one of the perceived causes of communication problems.

Thirdly, challenging my previous belief and the literature which emphasizes that teachers' communication skills are important elements promoting or hindering effective

classroom communication, the research contributes to knowledge that both teachers and students should be responsible for communicating effectively in class. I have laid emphasis on how teachers should communicate with the students and pointed out that teachers should pay great attention to the area because their poor communication skills, educational beliefs, personalities, not being careful of the wording, talking aggressively and offensively, and harsh criticism might be harmful to teaching and learning. However, the contribution of the teacher participants helps me develop new understanding that students' personalities and perspectives towards classroom communication should be taken into account as well since classroom communication should involve both teachers and students, especially in a language class.

In EFL classes, students' English levels is also an important element hindering or promoting effective communication because it decides whether students can understand their teachers speaking in English and whether their English levels can support them to talk in English. As discussed, the findings indicate that even in a teacher-centered class, teacher-student classroom communication is not always one-way. Therefore, both parties should take responsibility when communication problems arose. The realization of effective teacher-student classroom communication is a challenge and requires dedication and efforts from both teachers and students. Meanwhile, teachers and students play an equally important role in the interaction, which contributes to effective communication.

My fourth contribution to knowledge comes through insights into the impact of Confucianism. Although there are negative influences of Confucianism on teacher-student classroom communication, the shared context between teachers and students might promote effective teacher-student classroom communication. This insight extends what has been discussed in Chapter 2 concerning the influences of Confucianism on Chinese education by proposing a new understanding in a specific Chinese context. As discussed in Chapter 2, although there are voices criticizing the negative influences of Confucianism on teacher-student classroom communication in a Chinese context, my participants pointed out that they were accustomed to this kind of communication style. However, when their native English speaker language teachers did not realize the differences between western and eastern classroom communication, communication problems would arise. This cannot be attributed to the influences of Confucianism, but the neglect of cultural differences. The interpretations of my data contribute to knowledge that the teacher-student classroom communication style influenced by Confucianism such as the hierarchical relationship, the power distance, the teacher-centered teaching style and the collectivism do not cause communication problems

since both teachers and students are accustomed to it. The shared culture and language even makes classroom communication more effective. However, the problems lie in the teachers or the students themselves such as their communication skills, and personalities. The hierarchical relationship does not mean teachers' being rude to students but shows respect to teachers and knowledge. It is teachers' personalities that decide whether teachers will consider themselves as the authority so that they either do not pay attention to the wording or they do not accept students' arguing with them. Teachers' communication skill might also decide whether they are able to explain things clearly and transmit information and knowledge successfully. In addition, students' personalities can also attribute to effective or ineffective classroom communication because as emphasized both teachers and students are responsible for it. In summary, it is true that teacher-student classroom communication is influenced by the Chinese context and Confucianism. Compared with the native English speaker language teachers, the non-native English speaker language teachers' and students' educational beliefs are different. However, challenging my previous understandings, this does not indicate that the influences are all negative leading to communication problems. Therefore, what should be done is to appeal to more attention paid to the importance of teacher-student classroom communication so that both teachers and students will make changes to promote effective classroom communication.

In addition to the contribution of the research to knowledge, the problems of teacher-student classroom communication in EFL classes are uncovered based on the research findings. Firstly, teacher-centered lecture mode does not help the fulfilment of both pedagogical and psychological functions of teacher-student classroom communication. On one hand, it over-emphasizes the pedagogical function. On the other hand, considering the context of EFL classes, speech communication is not only the tool but also the teaching and learning object. Students should have the opportunities to talk in class so as to practice English. However, the teacher-centered lecture mode provides limited opportunities when teachers are talking all the time to complete teaching tasks. Hence, the teacher-centered lecture mode is not friendly to language classes. Secondly, big class sizes are not helpful to effective teacher-student classroom communication in language classes. The class time duration is limited. When the class size is big, the time left for students to talk is limited. Under this circumstance, it is even worse that not every student can get a chance to talk. It is even harmful to language classes because students don't have the opportunities to practice language. Lastly, English as a communication medium in EFL classes largely decides whether the communication between

teachers and students can be effective especially when the teachers are native English speakers who are not able to speak Chinese and who are not familiar with Chinese cultures and traditions. Under the circumstance, students' English level is an important element hindering or promoting classroom communication.

In summary, the study provides the empirical evidence and facilitates the understanding of this field, thus promoting more attention paid to teacher-student classroom communication. The contribution of the research to knowledge leads to the potential implications for practice which will be discussed in the next section.

## **7.2 Potential Implications for Practice**

As discussed in the above section, I aimed to make teacher-student classroom communication valued and raise the awareness of the importance and the positive influences it might bring to teachers and students. This study has provided new insights into the issue. Therefore, the potential implications of the research are considered for better practice in classroom communication.

### *Potential Implications for Native English Speaker Language Teachers*

Although both the teacher and student participants noted that language and culture might be two barriers to effective classroom communication in language classes taught by native English speaker teachers, there are advantages of this group of teachers such as their valuing two-way classroom communication, frequent encouragement, and relaxing ways and casual habits of talking. According to the participants, proverbs and idioms, simple words and short sentences, slowing speaking speed and using body language are useful strategies promoting classroom communication when students cannot understand their native English speaker language teachers for linguistic difficulties. This viewpoint is supported by Young and Faux (2012). Additionally, knowing about the context including cultures, sensitive political standpoints, and traditions helps native English speaker language teachers have more common interests with their students. On one hand, conflicts resulting from different cultures and political standpoints can be avoided or reduced. On the other hand, knowing about the context helps native English speaker language teachers get to know the students and their interests better, leading to more common topics in class. Based on the research results, it can be concluded that native English speaker language teachers can take advantage of their strengths whilst make up for the weaknesses. Firstly, being aware of the differences in classroom

communication styles is essential. According to the findings, many classroom communication problems in EFL classes arise because of the neglect of the differences between western and eastern countries concerning classroom communication. Secondly, native English speaker language teachers should take culture and context into consideration. Taking teacher development courses designed for native English speaker teachers might be a good way. In the private university I work within, there are academic activities such as observing classes, and native and non-native English speaker language teachers' idea exchange activity, which are also effective ways to acquire cultural and contextual information. Teaching English language in a Chinese context is difficult. Therefore, knowing about the cultures, traditions, and students' speech habits helps native English speaker language teachers adjust to the differences so that changes can be made to communicate with the students more effectively. It can also help native English speaker language teachers to know their students better, which is beneficial to a positive teacher-student relationship.

#### *Potential Implications for Non-native English Speaker Language Teachers*

As stated by the participants, one of the greatest advantages of non-native English speaker language teachers is the shared culture and language. When there are difficult points or language problems, Chinese is always helpful to clear barriers and promote understanding. In addition, the shared culture reduces the risk of misunderstandings and conflicts caused by cultural differences. However, power distance hinders equal communication in class. It is true that power distance is not created and held by teachers, but exists as the legacy of the Chinese educational context. Teachers consider themselves and are considered as authority (Zhang, 2019). As discussed, the power distance itself does not cause communication problems. However, problems arise when teachers believe they are superior to students, they know everything, they do not accept equal communication, questioning, or challenging, and they think students should obey what they say all the time. Under the circumstance, students are afraid of teachers, which is not helpful to effective classroom communication. Hence, influenced by Confucianism, although the fact that power distance and the hierarchical relationship between teachers and students exist cannot be changed, I suggest that non-native English speaker language teachers should make a change in their attitudes. Regarding power distance and hierarchical relationship as a respect to teachers and knowledge rather than teachers' privilege, communicating and treating students on equal terms, and attending teacher development programs such as department meetings and seminars to develop communication



skills are effective and efficient strategies. When teachers make changes and become better can the influences of Confucianism turn positive rather than negative. As illustrated in the revised conceptual framework, the context influences teachers' and students' educational beliefs and behaviors. Teachers' and students' educational beliefs might also have an impact on the context. This is why the two-way arrows exist in the conceptual framework.

Moreover, non-native English speaker teachers are more likely to think of their identity as a person transmitting knowledge and solving problems rather than a class organizer or a facilitator (Carr & Landon, 1998). Therefore, the teacher-centered lecture mode teaching style which is not friendly to a two-way classroom communication prevails even in EFL classes (Xie, 2009). The teacher-centered lecture mode allows the teachers talk all the time so that the non-native English speaker language teachers believe that in this way more knowledge can be transmitted to their students. However, the findings of the data analysis suggest that a change should be encouraged since two-way teacher-student communication is indispensable to both teaching and learning, especially in a language class. Being aware of the issue is significant. A student-centered teaching mode which facilitates communication between teachers and students in class can be adopted so that teachers' identities can be diversified rather than limited to knowledge transmitters. By more communication and interaction with students in class, the power distance might be reduced to some extent. Non-native English language teachers not only should be aware of the importance of effective teacher-student classroom communication but also should change the lecture mode teaching style so that the class is more interactive. I therefore propose that a student-centered teaching mode might be more friendly to two-way communication.

#### *Potential Implications for Students*

As emphasized, this research was conducted in a complex context. The EFL classes decide that there are different cultures and language involved. In such a context, on one hand, teacher-student classroom communication is influenced by the Chinese context and Confucianism. On the other hand, English as a foreign language is both the communication tool and the target teaching and learning object. This is different from other courses in which Chinese is the only communication tool. Under the circumstance, both the teacher and student participants indicated that students' English level was one of the main factors causing communication problems. Therefore, I propose that students should improve their language proficiency and competence so that language anxiety can be reduced and confidence can be

increased (Han & Haider, 2022). For one thing, I suggest that students should overcome psychological barriers so that they are more confident and less afraid of making mistakes. For another thing, to improve the English level, students could spend more time and dedicate more to English language learning. For instance, enlarging vocabulary, doing more reading and writing, and actively communicating with teachers in English in class are all useful strategies. In addition to the language problem, the teacher participants also expressed the expectation of two-way communication in class. Although students are accustomed to a Chinese style classroom communication, they should be aware of the fact that in EFL classes, they are facing a different group of teachers with different cultures. The neglect of culture differences and different communication styles result in communication problems. In spite of the influences of the cultural and educational context, students should also raise awareness of the importance of classroom communication. On one hand, students should realize that communication is encouraged in class. On the other hand, effective classroom communication can be achieved with the endeavor of both teachers and students.

#### *Potential Implications for Teachers/Educators*

It can be concluded from the findings of the study that there are points deserving all teachers and educators' attention. Firstly, humiliating and offensive words and expressions should be avoided in class for they might cause irreversible emotional hurt. Although teachers' status is considered higher than students in China, teachers should be careful not to talk in an unequal manner such as talking in a commanding tone, and regarding themselves as authority who cannot be challenged or questioned. Instead, it is helpful to communicate effectively when teachers make the students feel safe and respected so that they believe they have the right to talk, challenge, share different viewpoints, interrupt, raise and answer questions freely. And this is a finding which confirms Black's (2005) argument. Timely confirmation, encouragement and feedback are essential because this helps the students feel that their voices are heard and valued, their difficulties are noticed, and help is provided when necessary so that they have more confidence and courage to contribute more and they will be more willing to communicate in class (Zhang, 2019). Emotional support is as important as achieving pedagogical purposes. These principles can not only be applied in EFL classes but are general rules to all classes. Further training and academic activities such as observing model teachers' classes might be helpful to support teachers to improve the practice. Regular department meeting is another effective way for teachers to share experience and ideas.

### *Potential Implications for Policy-makers/School Leaders*

One result of the study supported by Garside's (1996) argument indicate that the traditional educational beliefs and concepts influenced by Confucianism over-emphasize teachers rather than students, and learning through listening rather than learning through communication and interaction. The change of educational beliefs and the transformation from teacher-centered lecture-mode teaching from interactive mode teaching is challenged by the cultural values in Confucianism. The change of educational emphasis on classroom communication is an important trend (Davis, 1993; Garside, 1996; McKeachie, 2002; Wolfe & Wolfe, 2004), to which attention should be paid by Chinese educational authority. Teachers' roles in class are no longer limited to serving pedagogical purposes while students' academic tasks are no longer limited to listening to teachers talking and taking down notes. Instead, teaching and learning should occur via effective classroom communication between teachers and students. Moreover, over-emphasizing achieving pedagogical purposes via classroom communication results in the neglect of other roles such as emotional support of classroom communication. The important roles and functions of teacher-student classroom communication should not only be aware of and recognized by teachers and students, but by the educational policy-makers and school leaders as well so that improvements and changes can be made. I propose that raising awareness is the most important move. The policy-makers and school leaders should hold academic activities such as seminars to appeal to more attention paid to this area. Besides, policy-makers might consider the fact that small-sized classes with fewer number of students are more convenient and helpful to promote communication (Krane, Karlsson, Ness & Binder, 2016). Lastly, school leaders could think about the possibility of designing the classroom layout in a way more friendly to teacher-student communication and interaction. For instance, the fixed chairs and desks could be replaced by the movable ones; the linear layout could be replaced by the round-table layout.

In this section, I put forward potential implications for better practices in terms of teacher-student classroom communication from different angles. The recommendations are based on the theories I propose in Chapter 6 and the reorganized conceptual framework presented at the end of Chapter 6, which illustrates two important roles teacher-student classroom communication play—functional (pedagogical) roles and psychological roles. In the next section, I end this thesis by reflecting on the entire process of conducting the research, conducting the research in two languages and cultures, how my personal positions, and

identities have influenced the study, how my educational beliefs have been influenced, and the impact of the research on me.

### **7.3 Final Reflections**

In Chapter 1, I clarified that my personal experiences and interest are two main reasons why I selected this research topic. I also resolved that I would conduct the research in a reflexive approach. During the entire research process, I have noted down the reflections in a journal. This allows me to self-examine the research process and myself within it. It functions as a reminder warning me to be careful and cautious when doing qualitative research to ensure validity and reliability. I feel it is important to reflect on how my personal positions, and identities as both a teacher and a researcher, and an insider and an outsider influence the study, the strategies I have adopted to take account of the influences and what the identities bring to me and the study. After that, the difficulties and potential risks of doing the research in two languages and two cultures are discussed. And then I review my personal educational beliefs concerning teacher-student communication, the influences they might bring to the research, and how my beliefs change after completing the research. The chapter ends with my reflection on the impact of the research on me.

#### **7.3.1 Researcher Positionality—Me as a Non-native English Speaker Language Teacher and Researcher/an Insider and an Outsider**

The research has inevitably been influenced by various factors including my multiple identities and positions (Berger, 2015). As argued by Piedra (2023), my beliefs, attitudes, experiences, background and identities are integral part of my research process. Researcher positionality arises from multiple identities which then shape a researcher's life experiences and personal concept (Jacobson & Mustafa, 2019). It is usually described in terms of a researcher's critical evaluation of his/her impact on the research process and the decisions made for the research (Piedra, 2023). As I made the final reflections, I evaluated my identities as both a researcher and a teacher, an insider and an outsider and the impacts brought by my multiple identities to this research because this might have an impact on the access to participants' stories, the relationship between the researcher and the participants, and the findings and conclusions of the research, which might bring both benefits and risks or biases to this study (Berger, 2015; Dodgson, 2019). Being a reflexive teacher and researcher urges

me to think critically and self-examine the way I conducted the research and all stages of the entire research process (Bourke, 2014; Bukamal, 2022).

### *Non-native English speaker Teacher-researcher Identity*

I have always positioned myself as a teacher rather than a researcher when referring to identities because the identity of a teacher and the experiences of a teacher have prompted this study. My interest in this topic was inspired by my experiences as a student and as an EFL teacher. Meanwhile, my reactions to teaching have been influenced through the experiences and process of conducting the research (Tsang, 1998; Adams, 1999). In addition, since this research was conducted in the Chinese context, my cultural identity as a non-native English speaker language teacher also had an impact on the research such as my methodological decisions, the selection of the participants, and the data collection process. Firstly, I allowed oral permission instead of signing consent forms because as a non-native English language teacher, I understood my participants' anxiety of providing formal signature. Secondly, my participants were all selected from the university I work within because I knew the policy clearly in the Chinese context. It was rather difficult to recruit participants from other public or private universities in China. Lastly, as a non-native English speaker language teacher, I understood the Chinese context and what was special of teacher-student classroom communication in EFL classes since there were different cultures involved.

Being a teacher-researcher is advantageous in six aspects. Firstly, being a teacher enables me to be familiar with the educational field of Higher Education system in China and the situations of the university I work within. I am clear about what happens in the classroom between teachers and students concerning communication. However, this is my experience. The research helped me to look at the experience of participants more broadly. Secondly, working in the university provides numerous conveniences including abundant academic resources, easier recruitment and access to participants, and optional research venues (Hayfield & Huxley, 2015). Thirdly, school academic activities such as teaching, observing classes, various seminars, and forums all contribute to the accumulation of experience which eventually converts into tacit knowledge which means the knowledge deriving from people's cognitive thought and accumulated from experiences (Suppiah & Sandhu, 2011). Tacit knowledge makes me more experienced in educational field, leading to easier and deeper understanding of the issues and the situations concerning classroom communication in China and in the university I work within, which has been discussed in Chapter 1. Fourthly, since the

participants are my colleagues and students, we either know each other well or are familiar with each other. They might be more willing to disclose frankly and deeply. Therefore, the data collected might be more reliable because of the close relationship and mutual trust between the participants and me. In the meantime, I am more cautious and careful dealing with ethical considerations so as to protect the colleague and teacher-student relationship. Besides, teaching in the same university also enables me to be familiar with my colleagues' positions so that I'm able to consider ethical issues more comprehensively and in detail. Lastly, having been a teacher for years makes me empathetic and sensitive, which allows me to honor the participants' perspectives and experiences.

In spite of these advantages brought by my teacher-researcher identity, disadvantages might co-exist simultaneously. For one thing, due to the close colleague and teacher-student relationship, the participants might feel either too relaxed or too nervous. The over-relaxed participants might disclose too much, leading to distractions, invalid data, and exposure of privacies which might cause ethical problems. The over-nervous participants might not tell the truths or they might disclose inadequately. Therefore, when interviewing the participants, I set up a sensible boundary by emphasizing my identity as a professional researcher to ensure the relationship as neutral as possible. Another disadvantage of knowing the participants well lies in the selection of sample, which has been discussed in Chapter 6. Similarly, tacit knowledge, and being familiar with the researched field bring the potential risk of taken-for-granted knowledge and biases, and as LaSala (2003) warns, the risk runs through the entire research process. Therefore, I was cautious at each stage not to overlook or over-interpret issues and data because of my subjective judgement. Keeping a reflection journal, and returning to the participants for checking the meanings were effective strategies I adopted to minimize the risk. Moreover, shifting between these two identities is challenging as well. As mentioned in Chapter 1 and Chapter 3, I had been teaching when conducting the research in the university I work within. The participants were my colleagues and students, which made the identity shift confusing to both the participants and myself. It was especially a huge challenge to the student participants who were lack of experiences being involved in a research. As discussed, the colleague relationship and power differential might have an impact on the participants who might not wish to tell the truths. Hence, the explanation and emphasis of my identity as a researcher when interviewing the participants was essential and helpful.

### *Insider-outsider Position*

In addition to the multiple identities I hold, my position as both an insider and an outsider also adds to both strengths and weaknesses. The fact that there were student participants who were taught by me at the time the data was collected makes me an insider because these student participants referred to their experiences and the classroom communication of the classes I taught. My positionality in China grants me the insider identity while I myself was educated in U.K. grants me the outsider identity. Furthermore, as I work in the educational field, I have been already an insider. However, when interviewing all the participants, my identity was emphasized as a researcher who listened to the participants' stories and made their voices heard or at least a teacher who tried to emphasize my researcher role to my participants. My answers to the research questions was not included and I was not a participant. In this case, being considered as an outsider is sensible.

The strengths and weaknesses of being an insider have been reflected and discussed in the above section. It is true that as an outsider, it is not easy to thoroughly understand or accurately interpret participants' meanings because outsiders do not have the shared context with the participants. However, the strengths of being an outsider make up for the weaknesses of being an insider. Being an outsider enables me to step back and separate from the familiar zone so that I could explore the topic and issue from different angles critically via the outsider perspective and insight. The details and features that might be overlooked by my insider identity can be noticed (Hellowell, 2006; Tang, 2007). Besides, being an outsider allows me to remind myself to keep proper distance with the participants while I remain sensitive and empathetic to the experiences and lives of the participants since I am an insider as well.

Being an insider or outsider is an epistemological matter because the knowledge has been co-created between the participants and I during the interaction in the interviews (Griffith, 1998). Recognizing the positions as both an insider and an outsider helps me to take advantage of the strengths and avoid or make up for the weaknesses.

### **7.3.2 Doing Research in Two Languages and Cultures**

Another challenge of this study which I have been keeping reflecting on is the language and cultural differences and difficulties. Since I am not a native English speaker and the research has been conducted in the context of China, there are two languages and two cultures involved. The challenge has accompanied me at every stage throughout the entire research process.

The first challenge comes from writing the thesis in English. The difficulty does not lie in linguistic problems or language proficiency, but in the accurate usage of words and expressions. Although I have been teaching English language for years and I have experiences of studying in English-speaking countries, there are still possibilities that it is rather difficult to select one word or expression being able to precisely convey the exact meanings. Differences in thinking patterns and language habits add to the difficulty. Without the help of body language, academic writing in a second language is full of challenges. This might cause the distortion of my meanings since it is rather difficult to select a suitable word or phrases to express what I wish to convey.

However, the most difficult stage of doing the research in two languages and cultures is the data collection process. Due to the experiences of conducting the pilot studies, problems and challenges of doing the research in two languages and cultures had arisen. Therefore, before collecting the data, I had taken the issues into account carefully. As discussed in Chapter 3, since there were two groups of participants whose native languages were not English but Chinese instead, allowing them to choose from their preferred language or not was a dilemma. If participants were asked to be interviewed in English instead of their mother tongue, they might not be able to express freely, especially student participants whose English level was not high. If participants were allowed to talk in their native language, distortion was likely to occur in the following transcription and translation. As stated in Chapter 4, I eventually decided to allow the participants to choose from their preferred languages because the generation of rich and valid data was highly dependent on the participants. Hence, allowing them to talk in the language they felt comfortable and confident outweighed the worry of translation. Translation is the second challenge. The translation from English to Chinese of the consent form was relatively easier since the words and sentences were formal and standardized. By contrast, the translation of Chinese scripts of interviews was much more difficult owing to various situations. Usually, meanings could be well understood in Chinese. However, there was risk that the meanings were probably distorted during the process of translation. I might use improper words without noticing that or there were Chinese idioms and slang hard to be translated into English. During the translation process, my personal biases might also be incorporated. The different language habits and thinking patterns make authentic use of the language and conveying meanings accurately and precisely rather difficult. Being more careful, referring to the dictionaries, and double-checking the meanings with the participants were three feasible approaches I employed.



Doing the research in two languages and cultures is what I have been reflecting most for the translation of the scripts and what I write might have a direct impact on the findings and the study.

### 7.3.3 Reviewing My Educational Beliefs

In Chapter 1, I have stated my beliefs in the importance of teacher-student classroom communication. I asked my colleague to interview me with the same eight interview questions designed for the participants before collecting the data so that I could see if I developed understandings and gained knowledge of this field. Thus, I could reflect on how the research influenced my educational beliefs. The organized transcription has been shown in Appendix 4.

According to the responses to the interview questions, I highlighted the importance of teacher-student classroom communication by saying it was *'the essence and core of any class, any subject and any teaching'* and *'without it, teaching can never happen'* (quoted from my interview transcription). I added that it helped to build a positive teacher-student relationship, create an active classroom atmosphere, motivate students and transmit knowledge efficiently. Poor classroom communication would bring emotional hurt, indifferent teacher-student relationships, inactive atmosphere, and uninterested and less engaged students. Teachers' personalities, language proficiency, cultural differences and teachers' way of teaching were all elements hindering classroom communication between teachers and students. I held the belief that *'there are students who are highly motivated and have greater interest in the subject if teachers communicate very well with them. For example, explain points clearly, teach complex things in an easy way, encourage them, praise them, give positive and immediate feedback and comments, value their ideas, talk humorously and in a friendly way, admitting my own mistakes, apologizing, etc.'* (quoted from my interview transcription). However, *'Many Chinese teachers I know are not aware of the importance and they don't think it should be valued. They think it's too complex to think of how to communicate well and effective with the students. Their task is to teach knowledge, which means they tell the students what they should learn according to the syllabus. That's all that they care. That's the biggest problem'* (quoted from my interview transcription). Drawing from the extracts, I focused on the communication problems of non-native English speaker language teachers because I overemphasized that the Chinese context brought a negative impact on teacher-student

classroom communication while ignored that the shared cultures and languages facilitated effective classroom communication.

There are overlapping themes with the ones generated from the participants' data, which are consistent with what have been found in the literature as well.

When reflecting on my educational beliefs concerning teacher-student classroom communication, they do not change. However, the data analysis and presentation process enabled me to be aware of the points I had overlooked and I developed new understandings of the issues. For instance, I over-emphasized teachers' roles in classroom communication while neglecting that students should also be taken into account referring to the importance and influences of classroom communication. And I laid emphasis on the impacts of teacher-student classroom communication on learning rather than teaching. It is my identity as a teacher and my personal viewpoints that caused the bias. As an experienced teacher, I am confident of my teaching competence. Thus, I focus more on any factors that are beneficial to improve learning. Moreover, when there is problem occurring in class, I am more likely to attribute it to teachers because I believe teachers are elder, more experienced and more powerful organizers in the class.

However, the participants' viewpoints helped me step back as an outsider and consider the issue through different angles. This is also the contribution of the participants and the significance of the study—explore the field, find the truths, and appeal to more attention to be paid to this field. My beliefs in the importance of teacher-student classroom communication remains the same but new understandings have been developed based on the research findings. I now hold the belief that effective teacher-student classroom communication which contains pedagogical and psychological functions is important and beneficial to both teaching and learning.

#### **7.3.4 The Impact of the Research on Me**

The final reflection concerns the impact of the research on me. As mentioned, my personal experiences have triggered the study. I experienced both emotional hurt and support by what my teachers said when I was a student. Now I came to this study as an experienced teacher. Although my identity has changed, my attention to the classroom communication between teachers and students remains unchanged. As a teacher, students would complain to me and talk about how they were humiliated and criticized and how they felt disappointed and uninterested in class. I've also noticed there are teachers who do not take communication

seriously. As I wrote in the reflexive journal, *'it reminded me of my personal experience introduced in Chapter 1 as well. And this is the significance of conducting the research in a qualitative method—without the in-depth details of participants' experiences and stories, teachers might not know the importance of effective classroom communication and its impact on their students while students might not know they could also make contribution to effective classroom communication'*.

This research has confirmed my educational belief in the importance of teacher-student classroom communication and its positive influences on teaching and learning. The findings of the research urge me to pay more attention to the wording when teaching and invest more energy into communicating with the students and exploring more effective ways of classroom communication. As discussed above, this research has also provided an opportunity for me to be aware of my personal biases.

I have also realized the importance of taking ethics seriously through the research process. Ensuring the participants' privacy will not be invaded, their benefits will be well protected, and they will not be harmed or exploited is a researcher's responsibility and respect to the participants' rights and contribution.

During the process of conducting the research, I have improved research skills and interview techniques, and developed new understandings of this field via listening to the participants' voices and exploring and learning from the literature. I have become a researcher who thinks more critically and undertakes the research in a more professional, rigorous and academic way. I have learned to view issues through different lens and from different perspectives, and find truths by in-depth exploration via different methods rather than over-rely on my biased and stereotyped standpoints. My learning from the research has supported my confidence and commitment to advocating improving classroom communication within my colleagues and the university.

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# Appendix 1

**UNIVERSITY OF HERTFORDSHIRE  
ETHICS COMMITTEE FOR STUDIES INVOLVING THE USE OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS  
(‘ETHICS COMMITTEE’)**

**FORM EC3  
CONSENT FORM FOR STUDIES INVOLVING HUMAN PARTICIPANTS**

I, the undersigned [*please give your name here, in BLOCK CAPITALS*]

.....  
of [*please give contact details here, sufficient to enable the investigator to get in touch with you, such as a postal or email address*]  
.....

hereby freely agree to take part in the study entitled [*insert name of study here*]

... Exploring Communication in English as a Foreign Language Teaching in China—cross-cultural Comparison.....

(UH Protocol number ..... cEDU/PGR /UH/03987.....)

**1** I confirm that I have been given a Participant Information Sheet (a copy of which is attached to this form) giving particulars of the study, including its aim(s), methods and design, the names and contact details of key people and, as appropriate, the risks and potential benefits, how the information collected will be stored and for how long, and any plans for follow-up studies that might involve further approaches to participants. I have also been informed of how my personal information on this form will be stored and for how long. I have been given details of my involvement in the study. I have been told that in the event of any significant change to the aim(s) or design of the study I will be informed, and asked to renew my consent to participate in it.

**2** I have been assured that I may withdraw from the study at any time without disadvantage or having to give a reason.

**3** In giving my consent to participate in this study, I understand that voice, video or photo-recording will take place and I have been informed of how/whether this recording will be transmitted/displayed.

**4** I have been given information about the risks of my suffering harm or adverse effects. I have been told about the aftercare and support that will be offered to me in the event of this happening, and I have been assured that all such aftercare or support would be provided at no cost to myself. In signing this consent form I accept that medical attention might be sought for me, should circumstances require this.

**5** I have been told how information relating to me (data obtained in the course of the study, and data provided by me about myself) will be handled: how it will be kept secure, who will have access to it, and how it will or may be used.

**6** I understand that my participation in this study may reveal findings that could indicate that I might require medical advice. In that event, I will be informed and advised to consult my GP. If, during the study, evidence comes to light that I may have a pre-existing medical condition that may put others at risk, I understand that the University will refer me to the appropriate authorities and that I will not be allowed to take any further part in the study.

**7** I understand that if there is any revelation of unlawful activity or any indication of non-medical circumstances that would or has put others at risk, the University may refer the matter to the appropriate authorities.

**8** I have been told that I may at some time in the future be contacted again in connection with this or another study.

Signature of participant.....Date.....

Signature of (principal)

investigator.....Date.....

Name of (principal) investigator [*in BLOCK CAPITALS please*]

...WEN QIN.....

## Appendix 2

UNIVERSITY OF HERTFORDSHIRE

ETHICS COMMITTEE FOR STUDIES INVOLVING THE USE OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS  
(‘ETHICS COMMITTEE’)

### FORM EC6: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

1 **Title of study**

*Exploring Communication in English as a Foreign Language Teaching in China—  
Cross-cultural Comparison*

2 **Introduction**

You are being invited to take part in a study. Before you decide whether to do so, it is important that you understand the study that is being undertaken and what your involvement will include. Please take the time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Do not hesitate to ask us anything that is not clear or for any further information you would like to help you make your decision. Please do take your time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. The University’s regulations governing the conduct of studies involving human participants can be accessed via this link:

<http://sitem.herts.ac.uk/secreg/upr/RE01.htm>

Thank you for reading this.

3 **What is the purpose of this study?**

*The purpose of this study is to raise the awareness of the significance and importance of teacher-student communication in teacher, to explore differences and*

*make comparison between native-speaker and non-native speaker English teachers, to find the problems and solutions to teacher-student communication in a classroom setting.*

**4 Do I have to take part?**

It is completely up to you whether or not you decide to take part in this study. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. Agreeing to join the study does not mean that you have to complete it. You are free to withdraw at any stage without giving a reason. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part at all, will not affect any treatment/care that you may receive (should this be relevant).

**5 Are there any age or other restrictions that may prevent me from participating?**

*None.*

**6 How long will my part in the study take?**

If you decide to take part in this study, you will be involved in it for *not more than one hour for each interview. The whole research program is four years.*

**7 What will happen to me if I take part?**

The first thing to happen will be *being interviewed, given questionnaires and teaching videos will be observed and analyzed by the researcher.*

**8 What are the possible disadvantages, risks or side effects of taking part?**

*For the small-scale study and the whole research program, your language mistakes in the teaching video and in the class will be analyzed.*



9 **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

*Any results will be shared and teaching effect will be improved.*

10 **How will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?**

*This is a small-scale study included in my doctoral research and it will probably be used in the research later. This study is a practice of methodologies and methods. The personal data will be used in this 7000-word paper and discussed with my supervisors. However, the participant's name will not appear. It will be anonymous. The data will be analyzed and used in this small-scale study paper. It will not be shared by anyone else except the participant and the supervisors. In the one-month duration before I complete this study, the data will be stored electronically by myself only. However, the complete deletion of the data will be after the whole research is completed (July, 2022). It will be exactly the same for the whole research program. Participants' personal information and data will be well protected.*

11 **Audio-visual material**

*I am intending to create audio-visual materials and use the existing audio-visual material of the participants as well. They will be stored electronically in a coded document.*

12 **What will happen to the data collected within this study?**

- The data collected will be stored electronically, in a password-protected environment, for 48 months, after which time it will be destroyed under secure conditions;
- The data collected will be stored in hard copy by me in a locked cupboard for 48 months, after which time it will be destroyed under secure conditions;
- The data will be anonymised prior to storage.

13 **Will the data be required for use in further studies?**

- The data will not be used in any further studies;

14 **Who has reviewed this study?**

This study has been reviewed by:

- The University of Hertfordshire Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities Ethics Committee with Delegated Authority

The UH protocol number is *<enter>*

15 **Factors that might put others at risk**

None.

16 **Who can I contact if I have any questions?**

If you would like further information or would like to discuss any details personally, please get in touch with me, in writing, by phone or by email: *Wen Qin;*  
*cow\_qw@hotmail.com*

**Although we hope it is not the case, if you have any complaints or concerns about any aspect of the way you have been approached or treated during the course of this study, please write to the University's Secretary and Registrar at the following address:**

Secretary and Registrar  
University of Hertfordshire  
College Lane  
Hatfield  
Herts  
AL10 9AB

**Thank you very much for reading this information and giving consideration to taking part in this study.**

### Appendix 3

R: the researcher; C3: the participant

7 years of English teaching; Male

(I used different colors to highlight relevant responses to different research questions.)

R: 第一个问题就是 what do you think is the importance of teacher-student classroom communication?

The first question is 'what do you think is the importance of teacher-student classroom communication?

C3: 嗯, 它很重要。

Hummm, it's very important.

R: 嗯。

Huh.

C3: 我觉得非常重要。

I think it's very important.

R: 然后呢?

And then?

C3: 嗯, 我觉得, 教学本身就是一个交际的过程。

Hmmmm, I think, teaching itself is a process of communication.

R: 嗯。

Uh-huh.

P8: 嗯, 但凡是存在知识的传递就一定以交流为载体。所以, 我认为所有的, 按照常规的课堂教学模式来说, 所有的知识传授都应该建立在, 呃, 交际的基础之上。

Hmmmm, as long as there is the transmission of knowledge, the carrier must be communication. So I think all, according to a normal and conventional teaching mode, all the transmission of knowledge should be based on, er, based on communication.

R: 嗯。

Uh-huh.

C3: 嗯。

Uh-huh.

R: 那也就是说你觉得就是, 比如说, 一个好的交流的话, 它会不会对你的教学本身起到一定的影响呢?

That is to say, you think, for example, a good communication, will it influence your teaching itself?

C3: 当然好啦。它就是一个载体, 嗯, 如果用一个 metaphor 的话, 那我认为就是说, 它这个瓶子越好, 它里面装的酒的这个价值可能是一部分, 然后它这个酒的价钱就会越贵。那么我是这么想的, 所以说, 交流本身它质量越高, 你所传递信息的效率和效度就会越高。

Of course it's good. It is a carrier, hmmm, if I use a metaphor, then I think, kind of, the better the bottle is, the value of the wine contained, perhaps just a part, the price will be higher. And this is what I think, that is to say, the higher the quality of communication is, the higher efficiency and validity of the transmission of knowledge will be.

R: 嗯。那第二个问题, 你觉得就是, 外教和中教, 他在课堂交流上会有什么差别吗? Uh-huh. And the second question is, what do you think, as to foreign teachers and Chinese teachers, is there any difference in terms of classroom communication?

C3: 有! 肯定会有。嗯, 外教的话比如说, 指以英语为母语的西方外教的话, 他和中教本身就存在, 呃, 成长环境和教育背景方面的很大的不同, 所以说他的那个叫, 中文叫什么啊, 个性, personality, characteristics, 这些东西肯定和中教存在本质的差异。

Yes! Definitely yes. Hummmm, foreign teachers, for example, if this means those foreign teachers whose mother tongue is English, he and Chinese teachers, er, their growth environment and educational background are very different. So what is the Chinese? Ah! Personality, characteristics, there are intrinsic difference between them.

R: 嗯。

Uh-huh.

C3: 这也就是很先天性的决定了。嗯, 中国老师和中国老师, 外国老师和中国老师, 学生, 哦不对, 中国老师和中国学生, 外国老师和中国学生之间交流的话, 肯定是有本质的区别的。

This was innately decided. Hmmm, the communication between Chinese teacher and Chinese teacher, foreign teacher and Chinese students, oh, no, Chinese teacher and Chinese students, foreign teacher and Chinese students must be intrinsically different.

R: 嗯。

Uh-huh.

C3: 就是无论在课堂内外都是这样子的。那么另外一个方面来说, 对于教育的理念不同, 那么中国, 比如说传统的教学, 这个, 模板吧, 可能就是说以单向知识传递为主。

It is the same whether it is in or out of the classroom. And on the other hand, the concept of education is different. China, for example, the traditional teaching, this, mode, maybe focuses on the one-way transmission of knowledge .

R : 嗯。

Uh-huh.

C3 : 那这是我们中国文化的一部分啦, 对不对?

This is a part of Chinese culture, right?

R : 嗯。

Yeah.

C3 : 从背书开始啊什么的, 那么然后, 再对于老外来说的话, 他可能更加知道这一点, 那么比如说他认为所谓这个知识的获取是通过这个体验啊, 或者通过观点的一些输出啊, 这些方式去获得知识的。那我觉得他们的 teaching philosophy, 那么教学理念本来就是不同的。所以说在, 呃, 在课堂上, 他们想要呈现出来的感觉就是不一样的。

Start from memorizing texts, kind of that. And then, to foreigners, he might know this better. For example, he thinks the so-called knowledge acquirement is through experience, or some output of ideas, and such kind of ways. And I think their teaching philosophy, is already different. So, er, in the class, what they want to display is different.

R : 嗯。

Uh-huh.

C3 : 因此他们的交流是完全不同的。

So their communication is totally different.

R : 那, 那你觉得他们就是交流上会有什么不同呢?

Then what do you think are the differences?

C3 : 嗯, 你指什么?

Hmmmm, what do you mean by that?

R : 就是跟学生的对话啊, 交流啊什么的, 还是 non-content communication.

I mean the talk with students, kind of, communication, and non-content related communication.

C3: 任何吧, 我觉得是任何都有不同。那么如果在交流本身来说的话, 我觉得, 老外更在意一个反馈。

Everything. I think everything is different. In terms of communication itself, I think, foreigners care more about a feedback.

R : 哦。

Yeah.

C3：嗯，就是他一定要一个 re-confirmation.

Yeah, he definitely needs a re-confirmation.

R：嗯。

Uh-huh.

C3：那，比如说一个知识传递过去之后，他想要知道你是否到底有懂，或者说他会花很长时间在一些很小的事情上，去做循环的这个动作。

For example, after the transmission of a certain kind of knowledge, he wants to know whether you understand, or he will spend a long time on small things, to circulate this.

R：嗯。

Uh-huh.

C3：然后去确保每一个人去把它弄好了。而中国老师的话这方面可能会更加忽略一点。

嗯，这边可能会用到一个词叫作 covec, collectivism, 还有一个是 individualism。

And then ensure that everyone is figured out. But Chinese teachers might neglect this.

Hmmmm, I will use one word called 'covec, collectivism', and another one is 'individualism'.

R：嗯。那你觉得谁会出现更多的交流问题呢？或者说。。。。

Uh-huh. Who do you think will have more communication problems? Or...

C3：嗯。。。。

Hmmmm...

R：嗯，反正就是中教和外教你，你觉得就是谁可能会跟学生出现交流失败的问题会更，更多一点呢？

Hmmmm, as to foreign teachers and Chinese teachers, who do you think will have more communication failures with the students?

C3：可能是中教吧。

It might be Chinese teachers.

R：为什么?(laughing)

Why? (laughing)

C3: (laughing)因为我刚刚说了，因为这个，他们存在一个什么呢，那个叫什么，权利差距。

(laughing) 'Cos I just said, because, there exists a, what is it called? Power distance.

R：嗯。

Uh-huh.

C3：power distance。这个东西的话，因为我觉得有很多中教他完全可以忽略掉 communication 这一点。所以说，他可能会有很多隐藏的问题是不被发觉的。那么从学

生事后的反应上才知道，哦，原来是有问题的。那么这已经注定着他们的交流是没有达成的，在一定层面上来说。因为他和学生之间始终存在 power distance.

Power distance. It's, because I think many Chinese teachers will totally neglect communication. That is to say, there might be a lot of hidden problems undiscovered. They might be known through students' feedback afterwards. Oh, there is a problem. And this decides there is a communication failure between them, to some extent. Because there is power distance between him and the students.

R: 嗯。

Uh-huh.

C3: 而老外的话，他进了教室之后，他更加认为自己是这个知识的传递者，他要负责到底这种感觉，所以说他可能会，嗯，把自己的角色做的更到位一点，而不是特别在意这个 power distance。所以说，他们可能即便观察到了一些问题，也可以及时去改善。

But to foreigners, after he enters the classroom, he thinks himself more as a passer of knowledge. It's like, he has to be responsible for it, so he might, hmmm, play the role better instead of caring more about the power distance. So, even when they are aware there are some problems, they can improve them immediately.

R: 嗯。

Uh-huh.

C3: 嗯。

Yeah.

R: 那你会不会觉得说就是比如说像外教，因为是英语课。

Then do you think, like foreign teachers, because it's an English language class...

C3: 嗯。

Uh-huh.

R: 因为我们教的是英语语言，他会不会因为语言不同，文化不同，会更容易，会不会产生一些跟学生的交流问题呢？

Since we teach English language, will they have communication problems with students more easily because of different languages, cultures?

C3: 嗯，正因为你所说到的这一点，会存在一个先天性的不同，比如说语言啊，文化啊，那么可能互相在理解的时候就更为谨慎一点。

Hmmm, it's just because you mention that, there will be an innate difference, for example, language, culture, and they will be more careful when understanding each other's meanings.

R: 哦，嗯。



Oh, yeah.

C3：那么，比如说学生，他在进入课堂面对外教的时候，他会预设这个人和我是不一样的，我可能要存在更多的包容，或者说，一些很容易误解他的点，我可能要去换位思考一下，他真的是不是这个意思。这样一来的话，我觉得，呃，外教的角色其实是更安全的。

And, say, students, when he faces foreign teachers in the class, he will assume that this person is different from me. I might be more tolerant, or on some easily misunderstood points, I might think from his perspectives. He might not mean this. In that case, I think, er, foreign teacher might be safer.

R：嗯。

Uh-huh.

C3：嗯。因为学生对他的包容和容忍是比较多的。

Yeah. Because students will be more tolerant to them.

R：嗯。那你，你有没有上课碰到过就是和学生交流失败啊，或者无法交流啊，或者是这种例子吗？

Uh-huh. And, have you ever encountered communication failure with students in class, or you just cannot communicate? Is there any example?

C3：有啊。

Yes.

R：比如说？

Like?

C3：嗯，完全，完全封闭的学生。

Hmmmm, totally, totally silent (close) students.

R：哦。

O.K.

C3：这是我，这是我最害怕的一点。嗯。完全封闭的学生就是说，嗯，你跟他也无法建立一个个人关系， personal relationship.

This is the most thing that I, I'm afraid of. Hmmmm, a totally silent (close) student means, hmmmm, you can't build the personal relationship with him, personal relationship.

R：嗯。

Uh-huh.

C3：就，更不用谈这个教学和学习啦。所以说他完全打不开的话，我用这一个所谓的人性最根本的一个东西去打开他的话都失败的话，那么这就是完全失败的。

And let alone teaching and learning. So if he cannot 'open', if it fails when I use fundamental things related to human nature to 'open' him, then this absolutely fails.

R：嗯。

Uh-huh.

C3：会有这样子的。

Yeah, there is such case.

R：那你觉得这个原因是什么呢？是学生本身他就很封闭吗？还是什么？

Then what do you think is the reason? Is it because the student himself is silent (close)? Or?

C3：嗯，封闭。呃。。。。

Hmmmm, silent (close), er...

R：嗯，就是，就是他的性格问题吗？

Hmmmm, is it, is it due to his personality?

C3：嗯，对，或者说是，因为交流的方式不同，那我认为是很好的，学生是可以接受的，但是对于这个学生来说，他更加喜欢的交流方式是非常的，嗯，该怎么讲，非常的 very indirect。

Hmmmm, yeah, or I'd say, because of the different communication method, and I think it's good, it's acceptable to students, but to this student, the communication method he prefers might be very, hmmm, how to say, very, very indirect.

R：嗯。

Uh-huh.

C3：该怎么表达呢，就是说他认为的好的沟通方式应该是更为储蓄的，诸如此类的，或者他不能够接受这样非常主动的老师。

How to express, that is to say a good communication method should be more indirect in his mind, like this, or he cannot accept very direct teachers.

R：嗯

Uh-huh.

C3：嗯。所以说他就会变得更加封闭，那么在这个环节当中，这就是没有办法去进行有效沟通。当然在我传递我的信息的时候，我相信信息会作用到这个学生身上，但是我不确定是多少。

Yeah. So he will become more silent (close). In this process, the effective communication cannot be conducted. When I transmit my messages, I believe the messages will have impact on this student, but I'm not sure how much.

R：那你你，你会不会定义他这种情况，就是一种交流的失败呢？

And will you, will you, will you define this situation a communication failure?

C3：嗯。。。不知道。

Hmmmm, I don't know.

R：嗯，就你觉得就是他可能也没什么问题，你也可能没什么问题。

Hmmmm, you don't think he might have problems, you, either.

C3：嗯。

Yeah.

R：只是说对交流的观念是不同的对吧？

Is it just different communication concept?

C3：是。

Yeah.

R：对吧？

Is that correct?

C3：嗯。

Yeah.

R：他可能觉得就是，你，你不需要来跟我就是文字上啊，或者有什么互动的。

He might think, you, you don't need to literally, or interact with me.

C3：对。

Exactly.

R：只要默默的就可以了，那就是其实是你们两个你觉得都没有什么问题对吧？

Just silently. Actually both of you don't think there's a problem?

C3：嗯。

Yeah.

R：嗯。然后那你，你觉得就是你上课鼓励多还是你觉得外教上课鼓励更多？

O.K. And do you think you encourage more or foreign teachers encourage more?

C3：鼓励啊？

Encouragement?

R：嗯，对学生的鼓励。或者说你觉得中教群体鼓励的更多还是外教群体鼓励的更多？

Yeah, encouragement to the students. Or which group do you think encourages more, Chinese teachers or foreign teachers?

C3：嗯。。。我个人而言的话，我鼓励很多。

Hmmmm, to me personally, I encourage a lot.

R：嗯。

Uh-huh.

C3：呃，但是我不认为中教鼓励会很多，就因为我们中国向来是以一种该怎么讲，呃，叫叫叫什么呢，就是说，你可以说他激将，对吗？

Er, I don't think Chinese teachers encourage a lot, because we Chinese always, how to say, er, kind of, you can say 'dare'.

R：嗯。

Yeah.

C3：以这么一种形式去进行一个激励学生的方式，这种我不会去用，那么我更加给到的是直接性的鼓励。

Encourage students by such a kind of form. I don't use that. I give direct encouragement.

R：嗯。

Uh-huh.

C3：直接性的鼓励。那么我认为中教的群体当中，嗯，现在，年轻教师可能会更多一点，但这并不是我们中国文化的一部分我觉得，因为中国文化向来讲就一个自谦和。。。这个，这个，就这种东西啦。

Direct encouragement. I think in the group of Chinese teachers, hmmm, now, younger teachers will do more, but I don't think this is a part of our Chinese culture, because Chinese culture always emphasizes on modesty, kind of, kind of things.

R：嗯。

Uh-huh.

C3：所以说我并不认为它是一个中国传统文化的一部分，或者说主要的一部分。那么老外来说的话，外教来说的话，我觉得它肯定是一个必备的一个教学的或者说一个技能吧。

So I say that I don't think it's a part of Chinese traditional culture, or a main part. And to foreigners, foreign teachers, I think it's an essential teaching or skills.

R：嗯。

Uh-huh.

C3：他们可能会做的更多吧。

They might do more.

R：那你觉得你，上课因为鼓励很多嘛。

And you think you, encourage a lot in class...

C3：嗯。

Uh-huh.

R：那你觉得它对你的就是教，教学啊什么的，会有什么影响吗？

Do you think there will be any impact on your teaching, like that?

C3：有。肯定会有。

Yes. Definitely yes.

R：是有积极的影响还是？

Positive influence or?

C3：有积极的影响，嗯。那么一方面来讲的话，如果说，我给他一定的所谓的具体鼓励，比如说我觉得你应该去做哪些事情，怎么样去应对考试，他就会立马做起来，他认为这个事情是所有人都会遇到困难的，那么他也可以去面对这个困难。嗯，这是一点，另外一点的话，我在心理上建立了一个和学生更好的一个，嗯，该怎么讲。

Positive influence, yeah. On one hand, if I give him so-called detailed encouragement, for example, if I tell him I think you should do something, and how to deal with exams, he will do it immediately. He thinks everyone meets difficulties while he will be able to face it. Hmmmm, this is one point. On the other hand, I psychologically build a better, hmmm, how to express...

R：情感吗？

Feelings (relationship) ?

C3：情感，对，情感，包括爱和，这个，信任。

Feelings, yeah, feelings, including love, and, trust.

R：嗯。

Uh-huh.

C3：嗯，我觉得这两点是很重要的。他认为我是可以鼓励他的，他认为我是可以相信的，那么也就更加促进了我跟他之后的一个交流状态。

Yeah, I think these two points are very important. He thinks I will encourage him. He thinks I'm a person to trust. Then it promotes the later communication between us.

R：嗯。那，就是你觉得就是这种，你跟他的比如说是，在课堂里面的有效交流，然后会不会对他的这个 performance, engagement, learning attitudes 会有什么积极的影响吗？

Uh-huh. Then what do you think the positive impact will this kind of, he and you, like, the classroom effective communication have on his performance, engagement, and learning attitudes?

C3：绝对会啊。我认为绝对会。嗯，因为，当你给到他更，呃，关注越多的时候，他其实对你的关注就会越多。

Absolutely. I think absolutely. Hmmmm, because, when you give him, er, more attention, he actually gives you more attention as well.

R：嗯。

Uh-huh.

C3：嗯。那才有可能他对这门课的关注度会更高。

Yeah. Then he will pay more attention to this course

R：嗯。

Uh-huh.

C3：因此他对知识的吸收啊，或者说他自己的一个动力啊，来说的话肯定都是有一个绝对的促进作用的。

Because he absorbs knowledge, or he has a motivation, and it must be a positive stimulus.

R：嗯。

Uh-huh.

C3：这是肯定的。那么，因为你现在做的是课堂当中的，那么就算在课堂之外，比如说，通过别的社交媒体，去跟他们沟通，那么可以实现一个，嗯，跨越时间的，在任何时间，比如说，在晚上的时候，在他，呃，在做自习的时候，那么，比如说我发消息了，那么他可能就会去做我要说的这些事情。那么可能会有一个更加好的促进。对他整个来说的话，这个老师可能会很在意这一个课堂，那他是认真的，那我也是应当是认真的。

This is for sure. And, because what you do is in the classroom, even outside the class, for example, communicate with them via other social media. You can realize, hmmmm, across-time, at any time, say, in the evening, er, when he's self-studying, and, if I send a message, and he might do what I say. There will be a better promotion. To him, this teacher cares a lot about the class, and he's serious, I should be serious, too.

R：嗯。

Uh-huh.

C3：或者说如果我不认真的话，老师肯定对我会有负面评价，会影响到我的这个学习成绩。

Or if I'm not serious, the teacher will have a negative evaluation on me, it will affect my scores.

R：嗯。

Yeah.

C3：那么我觉得这是肯定的。可以谈自己的经历吗？

And I think this is for sure. Can I talk about my experience?

R：嗯。

Sure.

C3：教育当中的经历。

Education experience.

R：嗯。

Of course.

C3：那比如说，我如果遇到一个老师，我感觉他还是比较随意的，他很无所谓，那么我会认为这个课，嗯，可以非常马虎的应付过去。

Say, if I meet a teacher, I feel that he's at his will, he doesn't care, I think this class, hmmm, can be easily dealt with.

R：嗯。那最后一个问题就是，你觉得因为现在我们面对的都是大学生嘛，那相对中小学啊那些学生，就是，老师跟他的措辞啊，交流啊，嗯，你觉得就是，嗯，就是说中小学他比较脆弱。

Uh-huh. The last question is, do you think, because we face university students, compared with elementary schools, those pupils, the words, communication, do you think, hmmm, it's just, the elementary school and middle school students are vulnerable...

C3：嗯。

Uh-huh.

R：或者说比较小，可能老师用的措辞啊之类就要非常重要，那你觉得到了大学了，嗯，是不是可以说稍微，老师在措辞方面啊，或者跟他的讲话方面啊，可以稍微的，没，不用那么注意呢？或者说还是要更注意？

Or they are younger. The words teachers use might be very important. Do you think in universities, hmmm, is that to say teachers need a bit, or talk to him, need a bit, not pay too much attention? Or teachers should pay more attention?

C3：呃，我觉得会，**个人来说的话，我觉得是要更注意的。**

Er, I think yes, personally, I think it should be paid more attention.

R：嗯，为什么啊？

O.K. Why?

C3：他们，我，我考虑这个问题的方式不是因为他们受不受伤害，而是他们现在都是刚刚成年，那么在成年这个过程当中，应该让他懂，这个世界并不是什么都是温和的。

They, I, when I think about this question, I don't focus on whether they will be hurt, but instead, they are all adults, and during the growing process, we should make them understand, this world is not always tender.

R：嗯。

Uh-huh.

C3：那么，因此，我要给他一个真实的体验，在社会当中的体验，而并不是说，呃，考虑到他内心是如何承受，这方面我没有过多的去考虑，因为我觉得人和人之间只要，这个叫什么，实事求是那个词我也忘掉了。

Then, so, I'll give them a real experience, the social experience, but not, er, considering how they feel inside. I don't think too much about this, because I think as long as people, what is it called, real to each other, I forget the word (real).

R：嗯。

Uh-huh.

C3：那么，我会，我会告诉他呈现出一个社会当中比较真实的一个场景，而并不是说我要刻意去保护他的情绪啊诸如此类的。那么，我觉得对他的一个心理发展也是有帮助的。那么比如说，用更激励的言辞去跟他们交流，或者说去激励他们，刺激他们，我觉得我没有考虑这个方向。因为我自己的教育经历的话，也不是属于这种的，所以说，我不是相信这种棍棒底下出孝子的，所以说，我是一个正常吧，neutral，嗯。

And, I will, I will tell them, and show them a real scene in society, instead of protecting his, kind of, emotion intentionally. And, I think this helps his mental growth. For example, communicate with them with more encouraging words, or to motivate and stimulate them. I don't think I think about this aspect. Because of my personal education experience, it's not this kind. So, I don't believe in 'a filial kid is created by beaten by parents'. So, I think I'm normal, neutral, yes.



## Appendix 4

### My responses to the interview questions:

(An organized version, not the original transcript)

- 1) What is the importance of teacher-student classroom communication?

*It is the essence and core of any class, any subject, and any teaching. Without it, teaching can never happen.*

- 2) In what aspects is it important/why is it unimportant?

*It helps teachers and students know and understand each other, and build solid relationship. Encouragement and praise are the most important ways of communication done by teachers. I myself was seldom encouraged or praised by my parents. Instead, criticism came a lot. And I had met teachers who did not pay attention to the wording. I was considered as 'not clever' by one of my teachers. Teachers' status is high. If a teacher say that you are not clever, you will never be considered clever by your parents, and even yourself. It brought a lot of emotional hurt. Therefore, I was not a confident person once. So, what a teacher says is very important. It influences a child's life for a long time.*

- 3) What are the differences between native and non-native English speaker language teachers in terms of classroom communication?

*To me, native English speaker language teachers encourage and praise more than Chinese teachers. They are more polite and easy-going. They talk in a more relaxing and casual way. They are more likely to admit the mistakes they make. The polite words such as 'thank you, sorry, excuse me' are always ready. But it depends, not all the foreign teachers are amiable, and not all the Chinese teachers are strict and rigid.*

- 4) Which group of teachers have more communication problems with students?

*It depends. My instinct and first impression is that foreign teachers must have more communication problems with the students because of cultural and language differences. But articles and literature tells me that country is not one element to make judgement. The teachers' personalities are more important. Foreign teachers seem to have more problems because of language, but this is not the truth. Person is the most important factor.*

- 5) Have you encountered any communication conflict and talk about your experiences if there is any?

*Yes. There was one teacher who taught me Japanese language. I didn't think she taught very well. Most of the classmates thought so, too. Once she asked me to answer the question while I didn't know the answer. I said I did not know. She asked me in a very unfriendly and ironic way, 'In what aspect didn't you know?' Actually, I did not understand the sentence and the grammatical point. She did not explain it very clearly. But she got angry with me and I was the one to blame for. So, I did not want to talk to her any more. Her communication style was awful.*

- 6) What are the causes of classroom communication problems?

*There are many factors such as teachers' personalities, language problems, cultural differences, teachers' way of teaching. Foreign teachers are accustomed to a very heated classroom atmosphere of talking and interacting. But we Chinese students are not accustomed to it. It will cause communication problems, like, there is no feedback. And the Chinese teachers are accustomed to teaching all the way without communicating with students. Students are accustomed to being silent and listening and taking down notes. This is a problem itself.*

- 7) What are the negative impacts of classroom communication problems if there is any?

*The atmosphere is inactive. Misunderstandings are easily caused. Students are afraid of teachers. Both teachers and students are indifferent and there is no love or trust. Students will lose interest in the class and be engaged less and less.*

- 8) What are the impacts of effective teacher-student communication on students' learning attitudes and classroom performances?

*Students will be more easily motivated, engaged and active in class. According to my teaching experience, there are students who are highly motivated and have greater interest in the subject if teachers communicate very well with them. For example, explain points clearly, teach complex things in an easy way, encourage them, praise them, give positive and immediate feedbacks and comments, value their ideas, talk humorously and in a friendly way, admitting my own mistakes, apologizing, etc. Effective teacher-student communication is displayed in many different aspects. Many Chinese teachers I know are*

*not aware of the importance and they don't think it should be valued. They think it's too complex to think of how to communicate well and effective with the students. Their task is to teach knowledge, which means they tell the students what they should learn according to the syllabus. That's all that they care. That's the biggest problem.*